

# **SIXTEEN GREAT POEMS OF IFÁ**

**BY**

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# CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
<b>PREFACE</b>	
<b>PART I. INTRODUCTION</b>	<i>iii</i>
<b>THE IFÁ CULT AND ITS SYSTEM OF</b>	
<b>DIVINATION</b>	1
1. Ifá as a Divinity .. .. .	2
2. The Ifá Cult .. .. .	5
3. The Training of Ifá Priests .. .. .	8
4. The Instruments of Ifá Divination ..	12
5. The Process of Ifá Divination ..	22
6. Ifá Divination Sacrifice .. .. .	25
7. Ifá as a Literary and Philosophical System .. .. .	29
Notes .. .. .	39
Drawings of Ifá Divination Implements	43
 <b>PART II. SIXTEEN GREAT POEMS OF IFÁ</b>	 50
i. The Birth of the Ifá Divination System	51
ii. The Mythology of the Vulture And How He Became A King .. .. .	73
iii. Thoughts About Women .. .. .	105
iv. Ifá, Threatened By Death, Was Saved By the Giant Rat And Iyewa. ..	131
v. Orí As Each Individual's Personal Òrìṣà .. .. .	158
vi. Àjàlá And The Choice of Ori ..	178
vii. The Consequences of Marital Neglect Or How Àgbìgbò Bird Acquired The Pad On Its Head ..	208
viii. Ifá Punished His Unfaithful Diviners .. .. .	235.

ix.	The Great Conflict Between Ayé (Earth) and Ọrun (Heaven) Or Why the Vulture Has A Bald Head And the Child Sucks Its Mother's Breasts ..	261
x.	Ifá And the Àjẹ In Conflict ..	292
xi.	The Ọrìṣà And The Àjẹ In Conflict	309
xii.	A Mysterious Friend of Ọrúnmilà Threatened His Home In His Absence	323
xiii.	Ọlọfin And His Priceless Kolanut Tree .. .. .	341
xiv.	The Consequences of Overzealousness In Prayer Or How The Eye Got Its Pupil .. .. .	362
xv.	Ifá Told Four Puzzles To Prove That He Speaks In Parables .. ..	388
xvi.	Dew-Drops Became The Saviour At A Gathering of Enemies Where One Thing Devoured The Other .. ..	411
APPENDIX I. IFÁ PRIESTS' TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION OF THE POEMS		449
APPENDIX II. INFORMANTS AND FIELD METHODS .. .. .		463
BIBLIOGRAPHY .. .. .		466



## PREFACE

This work presents a total of sixteen long poems from the Ifá literary corpus which is by far the most important of the numerous genres of Yoruba oral literature. The method of training of Ifá priests and the mode of transmission of their repertoire represents a startling example of an indigenous African pre-literate academic system. The Yoruba people themselves regard Ifá as the great authority on their mythology, history and philosophy. Indeed, Ifá can be regarded as the unwritten text-book of Yoruba culture in its true historical and philosophical perspective. A better example of the meticulous care usually taken by pre-literate societies to preserve and disseminate the ingredients of their own culture can hardly be found.

This work, which is taken from a large collection made by the author over a period of ten years, is presented in Yoruba with an English translation and adequate annotations. Each poem is preceded by a thematic analysis which attempts to interpret the main core of its meaning. An appendix at the end of the work provides a traditional interpretation for each poem as supplied by the Ifá priests from whom the poems were collected.

Another appendix is devoted to informants and field methods featuring short notes on each informant as well as the method of collection, transcription and translation.

A short introduction to the whole work provides adequate information on the Ifá cult, its paraphernalia of divination as well as a short exposition of its literary and philosophical system. The introduction also

includes a discussion of the international nature of Ifá as a West Africa-wide system of divination.

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**PART I**

**INTRODUCTION**

**THE IFÁ CULT AND ITS SYSTEM  
OF DIVINATION**

## THE IFÁ CULT AND ITS SYSTEM OF DIVINATION

### (1) Ifá as a divinity

Ifá is undoubtedly the most important of the numerous divinities of the Yoruba people.<sup>1</sup> Apart from the name Ifá, he is also widely known as **Ọ̀rúnmìlà** and some people have speculated that the name Ifá originally referred to the divination instruments of this divinity while the name **Ọ̀rúnmìlà** was his personal name. However that might be, today the name Ifá is used both to refer to the divinity himself and also to refer to his paraphernalia. In addition to these two names, Ifá also has a number of appellations. He is known as **Afèdèfẹ̀yọ̀** (master of the **Ọ̀yọ̀** dialect as well as other languages); and **Akéréfinúṣọgbón** (the small man with a mind full of wisdom). Ifá priests also call this divinity by the revealing name **Ọ̀bariṣà** (king of the divinities), an appellation which confirms the premier position he holds among the Yoruba divinities.

In Yoruba mythology, Ifá is believed to be one of the major divinities who descended from **ọ̀run** (heaven) into the city of **Ifẹ̀** by means of an iron chain. Another version of the story of the occupation of **Ifẹ̀** by the divinities stated that they came over land under the leadership of **Ọ̀gún** who, with his cutlass, cut a path through which they made their way to **Ifẹ̀**. At this time in the history of mankind, according to this myth, the earth was uninhabited by human beings and the first myth quoted above states that the earth was covered with water. It was through the help of a hen who spread a basket-full of sand which they brought from **ọ̀run** that the divinities were able to land on solid ground at **Ifẹ̀**. **Ifẹ̀** is therefore regarded not only as

the cradle of the Yoruba people but also as the cradle of humanity.

Each of the divinities who landed at Ifẹ carried a specific assignment from Olódùmarè, the Yoruba High God.<sup>3</sup> Ifá was charged with the duty of moulding the young earth by the use of his profound wisdom and understanding. Ògún, the iron divinity, was charged with using his extra-ordinary physical power, bravery and prowess to tackle all problems of heroism and warfare. Òrìṣàńlá the creation divinity, was charged with the duty of moulding human beings in the shape in which we now find ourselves. Èṣù, the trickster god, was responsible for keeping àṣẹ, the divine and potent power with which the divinities performed supernatural powers.

After the divinities arrived at Ifẹ, they spread themselves into different parts of Yorubaland. Èṣù went to the city of Kétu;<sup>4</sup> Ògún went to the city of Šakí;<sup>5</sup> Òrìṣàńlá went to Ifón<sup>6</sup> while Òrúnmílà stayed at Ifẹ. He lived at a place known as Òkè-Ìgẹti for several years before he also left for Adó.<sup>7</sup> It was at Adó that he spent the remainder of his life. He raised a family of his own consisting of many wives and eight children.<sup>8</sup> He taught each of his eight children and a few friends and disciples the secrets of Ifá divination and each of these eight children subsequently became important kings in different parts of Yorubaland but after his sojourn at Adó for many years, he was forced to return to òrun due to an unbearable insult from his last-born son. The story of Òrúnmílà's return mentioned the confusion and disorder into which the earth was plunged as a result of his absence. This is not surprising because when he was on earth he represented the principle of wisdom, knowledge, order and continuity. His return therefore created a vacuum in

these vital areas of human civilization. The story also mentioned that his children made an attempt to bring him back from **òrun** but he refused to return. In his place, he gave each one of his children the sacred sixteen palmnuts<sup>9</sup> which became, since then, the most important symbol of Ifá divination. In other words, the vacuum created by the absence of **Òrúnmìlà** was filled by the sixteen palmnuts and the ritual, artistic, and literary system associated with it.

As has been mentioned above, Ifá is the Yoruba god of wisdom, knowledge and divination. His premier position among the divinities derived from his vast knowledge and wisdom. He is believed to be present when the universe was created by **Olódùmarè**. His knowledge therefore transcended all time (whether past, present or future) and space. It is also believed by the Yoruba that Ifá was a witness to everyman's choice of destiny.<sup>10</sup> Therefore it is necessary to go to him always to find out the true path of one's destiny. This is the reason why the Yoruba usually consult Ifá at every turn in their lives when a rite of passage is to be performed; namely, at the birth of a child, during marriage, when a chief is being installed, and at death. Furthermore, it is believed that the profound system of divination which Ifá bequeathed to his people has all the answers to human problems. Therefore when going on a journey, when taking a new farm for cultivation, and when making any important decision whatsoever, the Yoruba usually consult Ifá. Indeed, it is only through Ifá that one could reach all the other divinities in the Yoruba pantheon. It is through him, for example, that one can know when any divinity is angry with an individual or the community as a whole. Ifá is therefore the mouthpiece of all the other divinities.

Despite the profound wisdom, knowledge and authority of Ifá as a divinity, he is sometimes dependent on the power of Èṣù whenever he wanted to perform supernatural deeds. This is due in part to the fact that Ọ̀rúnmìlà is believed to have no bones in his body system. But more important than this is the fact that, as already mentioned, Èṣù is the keeper of àṣẹ which is a copy of the divine authority and power with which Olódùmarè created the universe and maintained its physical laws. Each of the divinities therefore whenever they wanted to perform supernatural powers had to borrow this divine power from Èṣù who is its keeper.

Èṣù is certainly the closest divinity to Ọ̀rúnmìlà in the Yoruba pantheon but their relationship is not always cordial mainly because Èṣù, as the ubiquitous and universal policeman, is unpredictable and cannot therefore be anybody's permanent ally. Many Ifá poems, some of which are included in this collection demonstrate the process of conflict and resolution which existed between these two divinities.

## (2) The Ifá Cult

The importance of Ifá as a divinity has been treated above. But what is the nature of the cult of this divinity, its organisation and function among the Yoruba? The Ifá cult is a semi-secret society. In fact, the word used to describe this cult among the Yoruba is *awo* which means 'secret'. The word *awo* can also be used to refer to any secret agreement, secret knowledge or secret society. The Yoruba word for an Ifá priest is *babalawo* which can roughly be translated into English as "father of the secrets". The

word **awo** is also sometimes used to denote an Ifá priest.

The Ifá cult consists of priests of Ifá who have undergone rigorous and long years of training and who have been initiated into the cult. Each Yoruba settlement, village or city has its own priests of Ifá. In each Yoruba kingdom, the priests of Ifá are arranged in a hierarchy. A good example of this hierarchical organisation is that of the old **Ọyó** kingdom where there exists a double leadership at the head of the cult. There is a political leader of the cult who is known as **Ọnàilémọlẹ** and there is a religious leader known as **Àràbà**. Below the **Àràbà**, there are a number of subordinate chief priests known as **Olúwo**. There is usually one **Olúwo** for each village, city or settlement but in a large city, there could be more than one. Each **Olúwo** also has his own hierarchy of priests subordinate to him.

The political head of the cult represents the interests of the state within the cult while the religious head is the final arbiter on religious matters. The political head is however regarded as senior to the religious leader and he is the link between the cult and the king. It is his duty to see that the cult does not engage in any matter detrimental to the interests of the state. He also arranges an Ifá festival every year on behalf of the king. This festival brings together most of the important Ifá priests from different parts of the state. Whenever the king needs the support of the Ifá cult either to perform sacrifices or to perform divination on matters affecting the interests of the state, the **Ọnàilémọlẹ** and his immediate deputies make all the arrangements on behalf of the king.

The religious leader of the cult is a sort of overseer



for all the priests within the state, but the person who actually sees to the day-to-day running of the cult is the **Olúwo** who is responsible for one village or city. The regular meetings of the cult are held in his house. These meetings are held in most cases every fourth<sup>11</sup> day and there is also a large gathering of the cult members once every month. During these meetings, Ifá priests discuss their private and professional problems and offer solutions as deemed necessary. They also chant Ifá poems and dance to the music of their own drums. In this way, the professional practice of the priests involved are kept alive. Those priests who have fallen behind their comrades in their learning get an opportunity to assess themselves and go back to their own stations to readjust themselves accordingly.

In several Yoruba cities nowadays there is an interesting development whereby the Ifá priests contribute money to build houses of worship at convenient locations where they hold their weekly and monthly meetings. In Lagos, this development has been more or less modelled along the Christian pattern.<sup>12</sup> The weekly meetings are held like the Sunday services in Church with reading of lessons, preaching of sermons and chanting of hymns. It is gratifying to note that this syncretic development is confined at present to the city of Lagos and its environs. In most parts of Yorubaland, Ifá priests still keep to their traditional mode of worship.

It has been mentioned above that the Ifá cult is a semi-secret society. It is secret in the sense that only initiated Ifá priests are admitted into the cult, and are allowed to take part in its rituals. But the society is not closed to any citizen who is willing to undertake

its long years of rigorous training. Women can also be members of the cult and can be initiated as priestesses of Ifá but in most cases, there are very few women who can undertake the long years of training demanded as a yardstick for initiation. This is due mainly to the demands of marital and parental life on women. However, there are a few important women in every community who take active part in the activities of the cult.

The secret of the survival of the Ifá cult, despite the long years of Christian and Muslim evangelism in Yorubaland, can be traced to its hierarchical organisation and its discipline which is a result of the rigorous training of its members. This makes it impossible for quacks or people who are not convinced of their faith in the system to survive. The result is that only the well disciplined, highly intelligent and committed few remain within the cult and continue to carry its burden throughout their lives.

### **(3) The Training of Ifá priests**

As we pointed out elsewhere, the training of Ifá priests represents a unique example in human endeavour and endurance. There are very few examples of human activities which require so much mental, psychological and physical perseverance. The training of Ifá priests therefore represents a supreme example of traditional African academic training.

For most people, the training starts very early in life at the age of ten, for example. The training could, however, begin at any age and middle-aged people are sometimes found among the novices. In most cases, the trainees live with their masters helping with domestic jobs and sometimes to weed their master's farms.

Some of the older trainees who have their own wives and children usually prefer to return to their families every evening after the day's learning is over.

During the period when the novice stays with his master, he sits near him whenever divination and offering of sacrifice is in progress. He listens attentively to his master's chants and interpretations of the poems. He also helps in holding the *ibò* or any other relevant paraphernalia of Ifá which his master wants to use during the process of divination. He and the client can also take part in chanting the refrain to each poem. In addition, his master sends him out on errands especially in connection with the collection of materials needed for the performance of sacrifice or the preparation of medicines. Such errands usually take him to the market-places, the farmlands near the city and to the homes of other Ifá priests. Through this informal process, therefore, the trainee Ifá priest acquaints himself with his environment and with the members of the Ifá cult in his area.

The first part of the formal training consists of teaching the novice how to make use of the divining chain<sup>13</sup> and the sacred palmnuts.<sup>14</sup> The trainee is taught the names of the signature of the *Odù* and he is encouraged to manipulate the instruments by himself so as to refresh his memory of what he learnt from his master. When the trainee completes this part of his education, he has to make some sacrifice and perform a ritual known as *ṣíṣí-òpèlẹ̀-já* (ceremony marking the end of the trainee's mastery of the manipulation of the divining chain.)

The next part of the training of the would-be Ifá priest is the systematic memorization of poems from the Ifá literary corpus beginning with the first and

most important **Odù** (category of Ifá divination poetry) to the least important. The trainee learns a complete poem at a time in the case of the short poems and sections of each poem in the case of the long poems. The trainee learns one or two lines at a time by parroting his master. When the would-be priest leaves his master each day, it is part of his training to remind himself what he has learnt. He does this by repeating to himself as many times as possible the verses or lines he learnt on that day. This process which helps him to gain self confidence and control over his verbal art is known as **rírán Ifá**.

When the trainee has achieved a mastery of a sufficient number of poems in each **Odù**, he proceeds to a systematic learning of their interpretations. He also learns the sacrifices associated with each poem.<sup>13</sup> This stage is very crucial to his education because without the traditional interpretations of each poem and their corresponding sacrifices, no Ifá priest can communicate meaningfully with his client. In fact, the client is more interested in the interpretation of each poem than in mere chanting. He is also keenly interested in the sacrifices that will be prescribed for him so that he may have the full confidence that the divinities and the ancestors are in support of whatever he plans to do.

After the would-be priest has learnt at least sixteen verses from each of the two-hundred-and-fifty-six **Odù** together with the sacrificial items and interpretations that go with them, he can present himself for initiation. The initiation ceremony gathers together most of the Ifá priests of the city or village concerned as well as their neighbouring areas. The ceremony takes several days of dancing, feasting and chanting

of Ifá poems. Part of the time is spent in the forest where the would-be priest is thoroughly examined on his competence in the Ifá system and outlook on life. He emerges, from there as a full Ifá priest and after more festivities he can be left to himself to start his own practice as an Ifá priest.

But his training does not end with his initiation. The training can be said to have imparted into him the minimum knowledge of the system he needs in order to be able to practise as an Ifá priest. But he also needs some specialised knowledge to be able to practise effectively.<sup>16</sup> In traditional Yoruba society, Ifá priests were the physicians, midwives and psychiatrists of their own communities. In order to be an effective Ifá priest, the newly initiated priest needs to gain competence in one of these and other fields of specialisation open to him.

The post-initiation training of the new priest usually takes him out of his immediate environment to far-away places. This is because he has to seek a renowned Ifá priest who has gained universal fame in the subject in which he wants to specialise. Having located the right man, he has to go to that specialist Ifá priest and live with him. His pre-initiation training takes anything between ten and twenty years depending on his age when he started the training, his own speed of learning and the eagerness of his master to impart knowledge to him. Post-initiation training takes at least another five years. It is after these long years of perseverance that the Ifá priest can settle down as a confident expert of the system. He can now have his own pupils and he too is regarded as a specialist to whom other people come from far-away places.

But his training does not end there. In fact, like

modern academic training, the education of an Ifá priest is a life-long process. Every Ifá priest knows not only that he has to gain constant re-inforcement in the things which he has learnt but also that he has to expose himself to new trends in the development of his field of specialisation. By a continuous process of learning, the devoted priest of Ifá keeps himself informed throughout life. The training of Ifá priests is therefore the supreme example of traditional academic training among the Yoruba. Furthermore, the training of Ifá priests shows that pre-literate societies can transmit bodies of well-codified knowledge from one generation to the other without knowing the art of writing.

#### **(4) The Instruments of Ifá Divination**

Three of the instruments used by Ifá priests for divination; namely, the sixteen sacred palmnuts, the divining chain, and the *ibò* have been mentioned above. These and other instruments of Ifá divination will now be discussed in detail.

##### **i) Ikin (The Sixteen Sacred Palmnuts)**

As already mentioned, when *Ọrúnmìlà* finally returned to *ọ̀run*, he replaced himself here on earth with the sixteen sacred palmnuts. Since then, the sacred palmnuts, known as *ikin*, have become the most important instruments of Ifá divination. The palmnuts used for this purpose are a special type and any palm-tree that produces them is known as *ọ̀pẹ̀ Ifá* (Ifá palm-tree). Each of the palmnuts has four eyelets on its thick, bottom edge. It is believed that if a single one of such palmnuts is mixed with other palmnuts and used for the preparation of palm-oil, the mixture will foam exceedingly while being fired and, as a result, will not

yield the best grade of oil. For this reason, people who are involved in the production of palm-oil will not cut the fruit of any palm-tree which they notice to bear the Ifá type of palmnuts.

When the sacred palmnuts are being used for divination, all of them are held inside one of the two palms while the Ifá priest tries to take them all at once with the other palm. In this process, if one nut remains inside his palm, he makes two upright marks on the yellow powder of divination. If two nuts remain, he makes one mark immediately below the two marks he first made. He makes either one or two marks in this way four times in two rows starting from the right to the left. If he has more than two nuts left inside his palm or if he has nothing left, he will make no mark at all. The outcome of this process is believed to be the signature of an **Odù**. Hence, if the Ifá priest continues to have two nuts left inside his palm each of the four times he makes his perpendicular marks both to the right and left, it means that he would make one mark four times on the right, and one mark four times on the left.<sup>17</sup> The result will be the signature of **Èjì Ogbè** (which means **Ogbè** two times i.e. **Ogbè** on the right and **Ogbè** on the left), the most important of the two hundred and fifty-six **Odù** in the Ifá divination system whose signature is as follows :

Èjì Ogbè ←		+	

If, on the other hand, the Ifá priest has one nut left each time, he will make two marks each time for each

of the eight times (four times on the right and four times on the left). The name of the signature which he prints as follows, is that of **Ọ̀yẹ̀kú Ẹ̀jì** (**Ọ̀yẹ̀kú** two times i.e. **Ọ̀yẹ̀kú** on the right and also on the left) :



**Ọ̀yẹ̀kú Ẹ̀jì** ← — **Ọ̀yẹ̀kú** + **Ọ̀yẹ̀kú**

All the **Odù** signatures which are the same on the right and left carry the word **Ẹ̀jì** except in the case of **Ogbè** where the word **Ẹ̀jì** (a reduced form of **Ẹ̀jì**) occurs. All the **Odù** carrying such names are known as the principal sixteen **Odù**.

The signature to the right-hand side is used as the basis for giving the sixteen basic names to the **Odù**. There are therefore sixteen basic names from which all the two hundred and fifty-six names are derived. These sixteen names are based on sixteen possible patterns of arranging four perpendicular lines on top of each other with one line standing either alone or side by side with another line. Four single perpendicular lines stand for **Ogbè** while four double perpendicular lines stand for **Ọ̀yẹ̀kú** etc. The 16 patterns to the right are then combined with those to the left in order to get the 256 derived patterns or names which we call **Odù**.

When the signature of the **Odù** on the right is different from that on the left, what we have is one of the minor **Odù** which are two hundred and forty in number. An example of this is **Ogbèyẹ̀kú**, the most important of the minor **Odù**, whose signature is as follows :




Ogbèyèkú <— Òyèkú + Ogbè

According to the myth quoted above, the sixteen sacred palmnuts are the most ancient of all the instruments of Ifá divination. They were the instruments with which Ifá replaced himself on earth after his final return to òrun. The sixteen sacred palmnuts therefore constitute the most important symbol of Ifá divination, and when the Ifá priest offers sacrifices, it is to these sacred palmnuts kept in a bowl that he presents his sacrifice.

## ii) Òpèlè (The Divining Chain)

Another important instrument of Ifá is the òpèlè (divining chain). This is a metal or cotton string around which eight half-nuts of the fruit of òpèlè tree are sewn. Four half nuts are attached to each half of the chain. In some cases, metals shaped like the òpèlè half-nuts are used. Each half-nut has an inside (rough) and an outside (smooth) surface.

The divining chain is held in the middle at the top which is usually left bare for this purpose, and the Ifá priest throws it away from himself. The chain is usually cast on a mat or tray made of straw.

The òpèlè is easier to manipulate than the sacred palmnuts. Instead of manipulating the palmnuts eight times and at the same time making marks on the diving board, all that the Ifá priest has to do when using the òpèlè is to cast the chain on the ground and quickly read the signature of the Odù presented thereby. As in the use of the sacred palmnuts, the Ifá

priest has to learn sixteen basic forms of presentation of the divining chain. For this purpose, the presentation on the right hand-side of the chain is the most basic. He has to learn by heart all the sixteen possible ways in which four half-nuts can present themselves with their outside (smooth) or inside (rough) surfaces. Thus, when all the nuts present their inside (rough) surfaces upward, the signature is that of **Ogbè** and when they present all their outside (smooth) surfaces upward, the signature is that of **Ọyèkú**. It follows therefore that when all the four half-nuts present their rough surfaces upward both to the right and left, the signature is that of **Ẹjì Ogbè** (i.e. **Ogbè** two times or **Ogbè + Ogbè**). In the same way, when all the four half-nuts on the right and all the four half-nuts to the left present their outside or smooth surfaces upwards the signature is that of **Ọyèkú Méjì** (i.e. **Ọyèkú** two times or **Ọyèkú + Ọyèkú**).

The **ọpẹlẹ** is used more frequently by the Ifá priest because it is easier to manipulate and also easier to carry about. For most of the private divinations involving individual clients, the Ifá priest uses the divining chain while he reserves the sixteen sacred palmnuts for more important occasions of public or ritualistic interest.

### iii) **Ìyẹ̀ròsùn (The Powder of Divination)**

The printing of perpendicular marks on a powdery substance kept inside a wooden tray has been mentioned above. This powder which is yellowish in colour is known as **ìyẹ̀ròsùn**. It is derived from a powder made by termites on the **ìròsùn** tree. Powders caused by termites derived from other trees for example the akee apple, the **ìrókò** tree and the bamboo are

sometimes used. The *iyèròsùn* is kept by the Ifá priest as something of high symbolic and medicinal value. Many medicinal preparations of Ifá are made with this powder because it is believed that, like the sixteen sacred palmnuts, they symbolise the ritual and ancient power of Ifá himself. This is why the client swallows part of the powder and rubs part of it on his forehead after divination.

iv) **Àpò Ifá (Bags for Keeping Ifá Divination Instruments)**

The *òpèlẹ* (divining chain) is usually kept in a bag which the Ifá priest hangs on his shoulder. The Ifá priest also keeps other instruments of divination such as the *ibò* and the *irókè* (see below) inside the same bag. It is due to the habit of Ifá priests in hanging the Ifá bag on their shoulders that they are called *akápò* (carriers of the Ifá bag). Although the flowing garment which he wears partially covers the bag, the Ifá priest can be singled out from the crowd mainly by the carrying of this bag which in fact forms part of his complete outfit. No Ifá priest worthy of his name goes out without carrying the bag on his shoulders.

The bag itself is usually made of cotton cloth (or sometimes leather) and, like the dress of the Ifá priest himself, dyed in light-blue traditional Yoruba dye-stuff. The bag is big enough to hold most of the things that the Ifá priest claims as sacrifice wherever he performs divination and prescribes sacrifice. There are some Ifá bags decorated with beads and cowries.

The purpose of carrying the bag wherever he goes is that in traditional Yoruba society, anybody could stop the Ifá priest on the way and ask that divination

be performed for him. The ever-patient Ifá priest must never refuse any such request and must not have the excuse that he could not perform the divination because his instruments are not around. All the important instruments of divination must always be kept inside the bag so that he can perform divination for anybody anywhere and at any time.

v) **Ìròkẹ́ (The Carved Ivory Rattle)**

**Ìròkẹ́** is usually made of carved ivory, wood or brass. An important Ifá priest holds it in his hand as a sign of authority. If he is a high-ranking Ifá priest, one of his pupils holds the **ìròkẹ́** and goes in front of him. The **ìròkẹ́** is usually carved in such a way that its apex is thin and its bottom part is thick like the tusk of an elephant.

The Ifá priest uses the **ìròkẹ́** to strike his wooden tray during the process of divination. It is believed that by so doing, he invokes the spirit of Ifá to be present during the process of divination. The **ìròkẹ́** therefore carries very high ritualistic value.

vi) **Ọpọ̀n Ifá, Àwo Ifá (Wooden Bowls Trays and Dishes of Ifá Divination)**

These wooden containers are of two types: flat ones, which may be called trays, and hollow ones which one may call cups or bowls. The trays which are of varying shapes and sizes are carved round the edges. Part of this carving includes an image of **Èṣù** and other objects associated with the worship of Ifá. The wooden tray, as mentioned above, is used for purposes of divination by means of the sixteen sacred palmnuts. The **ìyẹ̀ròsùn** (powder of divination) is kept inside the tray and all marks are printed on it in the manner described in detail above.

The wooden bowl of divination is used as a container for the **ikin**. The bowl usually has a carved lid. The bowl itself is divided into four compartments with raised edges. There is, however, a central part in the middle of the four compartments. The paraphernalia of Ifá divination are kept inside these compartments. But other objects such as cowries and kolanuts are also kept there. The divining chain may also be kept inside one of these compartments. The four portions are said to be symbolic of the four corners of the earth. The importance of keeping the sacred palmnuts in the central part is to symbolise the central position which Ifá occupies in the Yoruba world-view.

The divining dishes are used for the same purpose as the bowls. Several writers have pointed out the remarkable aesthetic qualities of the divining dishes of Ifá divination. Frobenius illustrates twenty of them and Bascom reports that it is probably the most versatile of all the sculptured forms produced by the Yoruba woodcarvers.

#### vii) **Òsùn (Ornamented Ifá Metal Staff)**

This staff is made of metal, usually iron. It is handled only by very important Ifá priests since it is believed that it is a symbol of a divinity closely associated with the worship of Ifá. This staff must not be allowed to fall down on its sides. Hence the saying: “Òdóró gangan là á bÓsùn” (Òsùn is always found in an erect position). The staff is therefore kept in an erect position in one corner of the house where children and pets cannot reach it.

#### viii) **Ìlù Ifá (Musical Instruments Associated with Ifá Worship)**

As mentioned above, during the weekly, monthly

and annual meetings of Ifá priests, there is usually chanting of Ifá poems with the accompaniment of drum music. The music could be produced by the conventional Yoruba drums e.g. the **dùndún** (talking drum). But there are also several drums which are associated with the worship of Ifá. These include **agogo** (metal gong), **àràn**, and **àgbá**. Of all the drums used in the production of Ifá music, the gong and **àràn** are the most important. The gong is beaten with sticks. There are usually many of them beaten together at once to produce a special Ifá rhythm. The **àràn** is beaten with hands or sticks made specially for that purpose. It also has its own peculiar melody which is characteristic of Ifá music.

#### ix) **Ìbò**

The **ìbò**, as will be shown below, is used to narrow down the message of Ifá to a particular point. Basically, it consists of a pair of cowries sewn together which stands for 'yes' and a piece of bone which stands for 'no'. After the appropriate **Odù** has been found, and the client himself has located the poem relevant to his problem during the process of chanting, the **ìbò** may then be used to elucidate further the message of Ifá to the client. For example, if the message of Ifá to the client revealed through the relevant poem is that Ifá sees danger involving death, the client may want to know whether this danger refers to himself directly or to any other member of his family. To find this out, the **ìbò** will be used. The client then whispers such questions requiring answers of 'yes' or 'no' to the **ìbò**. He may say for example, "Is this danger of death meant for me?" After whispering the question to the **ìbò**, the Ifá priest takes them from him

and uses them to touch his instruments of divination saying: "Well, Ifá, you have heard the question, now provide the appropriate answer".

The next step is that the Ifá priest then throws his chain twice while the client keeps each of the *ìbò* inside his clenched fists. If upon the second casting of the chain, the signature of the *Odù* that appears is that of a senior *Odù* to the one found during the first casting of the chain, the Ifá priest will ask that the client should produce the content of his right hand. But if the signature found on the second casting of the chain is that of a junior *Odù* to the first one, he will ask the client to produce the content of his left fist. When the fist is opened, if the content is the cowry shell, it means that the answer to the question is 'yes'. If what is found is the piece of bone, it means that the answer to the question is 'no'. If a 'no' answer is found, the divination process will continue until the answer 'yes' is found.

There are, however, a number of other implements used to supplement the *ìbò* in finding out the correct answer to questions. Each implement is symbolic of something. For example, a piece of hard stone stands for good health and a strong body. The black seed of ake-apple stands for *Ọ̀rúnmìlà* himself who is believed to be a very black person. Every Ifá priest carries a number of such implements which are generally associated by the Yoruba with certain human characteristics.

The *ìbò* therefore form an indispensable part of the interpretation of the prediction of Ifá. The traditional interpretation of the poems themselves is usually very broad and of general application. In order to make them relevant to a particular human being or situation,

one needs further clarification from the divinity himself through the use of the *ìbò*. As one of the poems in this collection rightly says "Ifá speaks only in parables". It is for the Ifá priest and his client with the aid of the *ìbò* to draw the right meaning from Ifá's message.

### **(5) The Process of Ifá Divination**

There are two types of divinations involving the use of Ifá instruments, namely private and public divinations. The Ifá priest is involved everyday with divinations for individuals or groups of clients. Such divinations usually take place in private because almost invariably the clients concerned bring their own private problems to the Ifá priest. Such problems include problems of marital life, of love or friendship as well as problems of ill-health, travelling outside the country, cultivation of new lands, etc. When such divinations are taking place, the Ifá priest and his clients usually sit in a secluded part of the house which the Ifá priest uses for private consultation.

Public divinations take place when there is a matter affecting the whole of the community and for which there is need to consult Ifá for guidance and advice. Such instances include lack of rain, the spread of dangerous diseases, the attack of swarms of locusts, etc. For such cases, divination takes place in the public or in the court of the ruler or sole authority of the community concerned. If the divination takes place in the house of one of the chiefs, important members of the community are invited to witness the divination.



Such public divinations are performed by high-ranking priests of Ifá.

Whether the divination is public or private, the client or someone representing the whole of the community has to speak to the divination instruments. He could also speak to a piece of coin or cowry shell which he then drops on the instruments. By so doing, it is believed that the client has communicated his wishes through the divination instruments to Ifá himself who will then provide an answer, through the appropriate **Odù**, to the client's problem. In most cases, the client speaks silently or whispers to the instruments or the coin so that the Ifá priest does not hear the message. This is done so as to prevent the possibility of creating a bias in the mind of the Ifá priest regarding the interpretation of the **Odù** that will eventually appear.

The next stage of the divination process is the manipulation of the divination instrument by the Ifá priest in order to arrive at the signature of an **Odù**. For public divinations, the Ifá priest in most cases uses the sixteen sacred palmnuts while he uses the divining chain for private consultations involving individual clients, but nothing stops him from using either of these two instruments for public or private divination. When either of the two divination instruments has been manipulated in the manner described above, the signature of an **Odù** is found and the Ifá priest proceeds immediately to chant as many poems as he knows from that particular **Odù**. It is incumbent on the client to stop the Ifá priest when he arrives at the poem which seems to be most relevant to his own purposes. In other words, it is the client himself who selects the poem which is relevant to his own problem.

After the relevant poem has been discovered, the Ifá priest proceeds to interpret its meaning to the client. The interpretation includes the prediction and warning of Ifá contained in the poem as well as the sacrifice that the client must offer. A traditional interpretation of this nature is provided in the appendix for each of the sixteen poems contained in this work.

If the client has further problems or questions to ask after the Ifá priest has finished his interpretation, the ever-patient Ifá priest listens attentively throughout. If he discovers that there are certain parts of the questions asked by the client which cannot be answered directly by him, the Ifá priest makes use of the *ìbò* in the manner described above to find out the appropriate solution from the divinity himself. The use of the *ìbò* therefore involves the Ifá priest in further manipulation of the Ifá divination instruments. Indeed, this part of the divination usually takes more time than all the previous steps put together.

After the client has completely satisfied himself of the relevance of the interpretation and prediction contained in the poem, he may then proceed to perform the relevant sacrifice which must have been enumerated for him by the Ifá priest. It is believed that if the prescribed sacrifice is performed immediately, it has greater effect than if it is delayed until a later time. However, the client is not forced to perform the sacrifice immediately. In fact, he may refuse to perform the sacrifice altogether. Whenever the client is ready to perform the sacrifice, the materials required are assembled while the Ifá priest decides (again, sometimes with the use of the *ìbò* and further manipulation of the divining chain) what to do with the sacrifice. In some cases, it may be decided that

the sacrifice should be placed on a cross-road while in others the sacrifice is placed on the shrine of a particular divinity. The Ifá priest may or may not be allowed to keep part of the sacrifice for himself. In all cases, the sacrifice must be disposed off according to the wishes of the divinity himself and the well laid-out ritual practice relevant to each case.

#### (6) Ifá Divination Sacrifice

As mentioned above, part of the training of every Ifá priest consists of the memorization of materials required for the performance of the relevant sacrifice to each Ifá poem. In other words, to every Ifá poem there must be a prescribed sacrifice. This is due to the belief that whatever the prediction of Ifá might be, sacrifice is essential for every client. Indeed, many Ifá poems end with a note stressing the importance of sacrifice and giving a warning about the consequences of neglect of sacrifice.<sup>18</sup> The offering of sacrifice is therefore central to the philosophy of Ifá divination poetry.

The Ifá priests and their clients see sacrifice as a means to placate the malevolent powers which they believe exist side by side with the divinities who are regarded as benevolent. These malevolent powers are collectively known as **Ajogun** and they include all the evil forces that affect human life e.g. death, illness and loss. The **Àjé** (Witches) are also included among the **Ajogun**. It is believed, as will be shown in detail below, that these powers are the eternal enemies of man to whom human beings must make sacrifice so as to avoid their evil schemes.

Sacrifice is also seen by the Yoruba as a means to provide the divinities and the ancestors with food. It is the duty of every individual to feed his ancestors

and the divinities whom he worships. This is why when a Yoruba person is eating, he would throw bits of the food on the floor as an invitation to the ancestors to join him or at least to bless the food that he is eating. Regularly, during the festival of each divinity and the annual ceremonies of the cult of ancestor worshippers, every person also offers food and drinks to his ancestors and the divinities. But in addition to these regular occasions when food is offered to the ancestors and the divinities, Ifá constantly provides the food which the divinities depend upon from day to day. All poems in the Ifá literary corpus contain prescribed sacrifices which must be offered to the divinities and the ancestors. Therefore when a person goes for consultation with Ifá, he will be told to offer sacrifice to his dead father or mother or to **Ògún** (the iron god), **Ṣàngó** (the thunder god) or even to Ifá himself. It is the belief of the person who offers such items of food and drinks to the divinities and the ancestors that his action is the wish of the supernatural powers and that by fulfilling this wish, he will constantly have the support of the divinities whenever any of the evil forces attempts to attack him.

Apart from this ritual aspect of sacrifice, there is an essentially human element in the offering of sacrifice. Sacrifice is a means of feeding the supernatural powers as it is a means of bringing together and feeding one's neighbours, friends and relations.<sup>19</sup> It is a means of making one's close associates taste of the fruits of one's labour and thereby receiving their blessing and support in whatever one wants to do. In fact, most of the sacrifices offered to the supernatural powers is consumed by human beings. The remnants are eaten up either by

human pets and domesticated animals like dogs, cats and goats or by wild animals and birds such as the vulture who is regarded as the bird of sacrifice. It is therefore only in the spiritual sense that the sacrifices are meant for the supernatural powers. Sacrifice therefore can be viewed as a means of uniting people and also of strengthening their bounds of relationship and association from time to time. Sacrifice could be seen as a means of keeping alive the family and lineage system. It is a means of attaining the continuity for which the ancestors and the divinities themselves stand.

The Yoruba also view sacrifice as a form of exchanging other materials (such as animals, birds, insects, clothes, foods) for human life.<sup>20</sup> They believe that when such materials are offered for sacrifice, the supernatural powers would take them and leave human beings untouched. A sick person, for example, is asked to offer animals and birds so as to substitute the lives of these victims for his own life. In the same way, offering of sacrifice is believed to be capable of warding off accidents, misfortune and other forms of human suffering.

The position of Èṣù is central to Ifá divination sacrifice. Èṣù is the power responsible for taking all sacrifices to the divinities. Some myths claim that Èṣù's wife who is known as Agbèrù (the collector of sacrifices) is the one who actually accepts all sacrifices and delivers them to her husband. It appears that Èṣù delivers the sacrifice to the divinity for which it is meant without keeping back any fraction of it except the five cowries which all myths refer to as the

“money” of Èṣù. Èṣù does not take the sacrifice to the Almighty God, Olódùmarè, himself as erroneously claimed by Bascom.<sup>21</sup> The Yoruba believe that Olódùmarè cannot be influenced by sacrifice. Hence, the saying which recurs in several Ifá poems, “Ta ní le f’Olódùmarè lẹbọ” (who dare offers sacrifice to Olódùmarè)

Sacrifice is therefore meant for the benevolent and the malevolent powers. Èṣù rewards or punishes he who performs or fails to perform sacrifice. Anyone who has performed sacrifice will generally receive Èṣù’s support. Hence, the saying, “Ènì ó rúbọ l’Èṣùú gbè” (Èṣù supports only those who have offered sacrifice).

The punishment measured out by Èṣù to those who do not perform sacrifice consists mainly in the invitation of the malevolent powers to attack such a person. This is possible because, although as a divinity Èṣù is one of the benevolent powers, he often sides with the **ajogun** (malevolent powers). Èṣù is therefore a neutral force in the eternal opposition between the benevolent and the malevolent powers. Èṣù even punishes his fellow divinities when they violate the divine rule regarding the performance of sacrifice.

The importance of **igún** (vulture) to Ifá divination sacrifice must also be mentioned here. **Igún** is the bird which is symbolic of sacrifice, hence his appellation “Igún, ètìé, ẹlẹwù ẹbọ” (**Igún**, nicknamed ètìé, whose garment is a symbol of sacrifice). One Ifá poem says that “without **igún**, nobody performs sacrifice.”

This central position of **igún** to sacrifice is a result of the habit of that bird in eating sacrifices. The Yoruba believe that when a sacrifice is placed at the shrine of any divinity, it must not be met intact on the second day. **Igún** or some other bird or animal should eat up the

sacrifice before it can be considered as accepted by the supernatural powers. By eating up sacrifices, **igún** helps in making them accepted by the supernatural powers. **Igún** is therefore essential to the acceptability or otherwise of sacrifices.

## (7) Ifá As A Literary and Philosophical System

### (i) The 256 Odù

It has been mentioned above that the Ifá literary corpus contains a total of 256 chapters or categories known in Yoruba as **Odù**. These chapters are divided into two parts namely, the major categories known as **Ojú Odù** which are 16 in number and the minor categories known as **Omọ Odù** or **Àmúlù Odù** which are 240. The **Ojú Odù** are considered to be by far senior to the minor **Odù**. There is a strict order of seniority ascribed to the complete 256 **Odù**. **Èjì Ogbè** is believed to be the first and most important **Odù** in the whole system. The order of seniority among the first sixteen **Odù** is as follows :

- |                |                    |
|----------------|--------------------|
| 1. Èjì Ogbè    | 2. Òyèkú Méjì      |
| 3. Ìwòrì Méjì  | 4. Òdí Méjì        |
| 5. Ìrosùn Méjì | 6. Òwónrín Méjì    |
| 7. Òbàrà Méjì  | 8. Òkànràn Méjì    |
| 9. Ògúndá Méjì | 10. Òsá Méjì       |
| 11. Ìká Méjì   | 12. Òtúúrúpòn Méjì |
| 13. Òtúá Méjì  | 14. Ìrètè Méjì     |
| 15. Òsẹ́ Méjì  | 16. Òfún Méjì      |

The list given above is accepted by most Ifá priests throughout Yorubaland but there are some notable local variations. The names given are, however, not exactly rendered in the same form from one dialect to the other. Some of the differences in the names of the **Odù** are predictable on the basis of the phonological

and morphological rules of the dialects concerned. Furthermore, some of the **Odù** have more than one name. For example, the sixteenth **Odù** is sometimes known as **Òràngún Méjì**. After taking the differences mentioned above into consideration, it would appear that the list supplied above has universal validity and acceptability.

**(ii) The Èṣẹ (verses) of the Ifá Literary Corpus**

Each of the 256 **Odù** has hundreds of poems or verses traditionally associated with it. It is believed that each **ẹṣẹ** has a total of 600 poems associated with it. In most cases, these are short poems of a few lines but in some cases, an Ifá poem may run into many lines. Such long poems are known as **Ifá Nláńlá** (Great Poems of Ifá). This book presents an anthology of sixteen of such long poems. These long poems have a traditionally high value among Ifá priests who regard them as the rare gems of the whole system. Hence the statement :

“Ifá nláńlá là á fíí gbafá nláńlá,  
Òògùn nláńlá là á fíí gbòògùn nláńlá.”<sup>22</sup>

(One gets a great poem of Ifá only in return for another great poem of Ifá,

One gets a highly potent medicinal preparation only in return for another highly potent one).

Each poem of Ifá whether long or short has a definite structural sequence. The present investigator has published elsewhere his detail analysis of the structure, style and language of Ifá divination poetry.<sup>23</sup> It will suffice here to mention that each **ẹṣẹ** Ifá has eight structural parts out of which four are obligatory and the remaining four are optional. The obligatory parts



must be chanted in the same form and, as much as possible within human mental capacity, in the same language. In other words, all Ifá priests within the same Yoruba dialect area would render the obligatory parts with the same accent and the same style of presentation. But the four optional parts are chanted by each Ifá priest in his own language. Here, the Ifá priest has freedom of creation to employ his own language, style and imagery when narrating the story of each poem the framework of which he has learnt from his master.

There is therefore a static and at the same time a dynamic aspect to every Ifá poem. It is a combination of both elements that make up the great poems of Ifá revered by all Ifá priests. The static element represents the myth-making aspect of each poem while the dynamic aspect represents the creative and imaginative genius of individual Ifá priests.

Each Ifá poem also has its own adornment of stylistic features. Two of the most important and characteristic features of Ifá style are repetition and word-play. Both of these stylistic features often occur in combination. A number of the patterns of repetition and word-play in Ifá literary corpus have also been analysed elsewhere by the present writer.<sup>24</sup> It will be sufficient here to mention that the richness of style and language of Ifá poems is very greatly valued and appreciated by the highly poetically-conscious Yoruba traditional society. The ordinary Yoruba patronises the Ifá priests not only because of their belief in the predictions and pronouncements of Ifá but also because of the aesthetic enjoyment which they derive from listening to the chanting of a form of poetry which is exceedingly rich in style and language. Since

traditional Yoruba society was non-literate, going to Ifá priests for divination therefore represented an important medium of contact with such a highly developed form of poetry. The contact which the traditionally minded Yoruba makes constantly with the Ifá literary corpus therefore enriches his aesthetic values and satisfies his imaginative instincts in the same way as modern novels, poems and films educate, satisfy and enrich the city dwellers.

### **iii) Ifá As An Indigenous African Philosophy and Thought System**

A close examination of the themes of Ifá divination poems reveals that they represent the traditional Yoruba world-view. Ifá literary corpus is therefore the storehouse of Yoruba culture inside which the Yoruba comprehension of their own historical experiences and understanding of their environment can always be found. Even until today Ifá is recognised by the Yoruba as a repository for Yoruba traditional body of knowledge embracing history, philosophy, medicine and folklore. A few of the highly philosophical concepts usually encountered in Ifá divination poetry are therefore discussed below.

#### **a) The Concept of Orí<sup>25</sup>**

One of the most basic and far-reaching concepts found in Ifá literary corpus is the concept of Orí. This concept underlines the Yoruba traditional belief in predestination. To the average Yoruba, success or failure, long life or early death, wealth or poverty, are aspects of human experience which are predestined by one's choice of Orí.

This fascinating concept states that after the moulding of every would-be infant by **Órìṣàṇlá**, the divinity responsible for creation, **Àjàlá** (another supernatural power who is not regarded as a divinity) supplies the **orí** (the head part) from his store-house of heads where all types of heads—big and small fired and unfired—are kept. But **Àjàlá** is a thoroughly incorrigible fellow so that most of the heads which he makes are bad. The result is that most individuals who choose heads for themselves without the aid of **Àjàlá** end up choosing bad and useless heads.

Once chosen, the head of each individual becomes a symbol of success or failure in life. Those who choose the good heads choose with it the potentiality to succeed in life while those who choose the bad heads are condemned to failure except they can work exceedingly hard and perform plenty of sacrifices. The choice of a good **orí** is, however, the choice of a potentiality to success not the choice of success itself. Every individual still has to work hard in order to bring this potentiality to actual realisation. But for those who have chosen bad **orí**, the only hope of redress lies in hard work coupled with the performance of much sacrifice since sacrifice is viewed as the element of reparation for one's inherent defects.

Since only **Ifá** is competent to pronounce on one's choice of destiny because he is regarded as the only witness to this divinely-sanctioned choice in heaven, it is important for every individual to consult **Ifá** from time to time to find out the true path of one's destiny. By consulting **Ifá**, one is merely trying to find out what has been kept in store by one's **Orí**. Divination is therefore regarded as the communication of the wishes of one's **Orí** to **Ifá** who will then reveal this to the

client through the appropriate chapter and verse of the **Odù** system.

**Orí** is therefore regarded as an intermediary between every man and the divinity whom he worships. Each individual's **Orí** is his personal divinity who regulates his life in conformity with the wishes of the divinities who exist for the general public interest. Whatever has not been sanctioned by one's **Orí** cannot be done by the divinities. **Orí** is the most important element of each individual's personality.

The concept of **Orí** is therefore basic to Yoruba philosophy of life. The concept helps the Yoruba to explain such otherwise incomprehensible happenings as sudden death, human suffering and goodluck. By shifting the responsibility for human failure or success largely from human beings, this concept frees them from any sense of guilt and despondency which usually causes psychological disturbances. However, the concept if taken too far can make one rest on one's oars in the belief that since one has chosen the elements to success or failure before one was born, there is no need to struggle. This happens when the individual fails to understand that **Orí** is only symbolic of the potentiality to lead a good or bad life, and that everyone still has to struggle in order to get along in life.

**b) Benevolent and malevolent supernatural powers** <sup>26</sup>

As mentioned above, the Yoruba believe in two types of supernatural powers — benevolent and malevolent. The benevolent powers are the divinities of the Yoruba pantheon such as **Ògún** (the iron divinity) **Oríṣàṅlá** (the creation divinity), and Ifá himself as well as the ancestors both male and female known collectively as **òkú-òrun**. The malevolent powers are known

collectively as **ajogun** (warriors against man) and they include the **àjé** (witches), **ikú** (death), **àrùn** (disease), **òfò** (loss), **ègbà** (paralysis), **òràn** (trouble), **èpè** (curse), **èwòn** (imprisonment) and **èṣe** (any other evil thing that affects human beings).

The benevolent powers are believed to be always by the side of man in the eternal struggle between man and the malevolent supernatural powers. For this reason, it is important that the good supernatural powers are taken care of and appeased through the offering of sacrifice. Once a man performs the sacrifices expected of him and leads a moral life in accordance with the divinely-sanctioned moral norms of the society, he can always expect that the benevolent supernatural powers will protect him against the evil plans of the malevolent powers and bestow blessings of children, money and good health on him from time to time. Many Ifá poems therefore mention the need for human beings to perform sacrifice and take good care of the benevolent supernatural powers.

In Ifá poems, there is also a constant reference to the inevitable conflict between the benevolent and the malevolent supernatural powers. This conflict arises out of their opposing interests concerning the regulation of human life. While the malevolent powers are interested in the destruction of human beings, the benevolent powers are interested in the preservation of human society and the happiness of man generally. The result is often a constant conflict between these two opposing powers. A number of poems in this collection are devoted to the theme of conflict between the supernatural powers.

### c) Nature — An Indigenous African View of His Environment<sup>27</sup>

The Ifá literary corpus is also full of poems devoted to a deep appreciation of the Yoruba natural environment. There are many poems focussing attention on hills, rivers, wild and domesticated animals, birds, insects etc. This therefore, shows the deep appreciation of nature which abounds in Yoruba oral literature.

In the Ifá literary corpus, as in other types of Yoruba oral literature, objects of nature are presented in essentially human form. To the Ifá priest during the process of the narration of his poetry, animals, hills, rivers, take human form so that they can speak, laugh, marry, eat and drink like human beings. All objects of nature mentioned in the Ifá literary corpus are therefore personified. This gives the Ifá priest a great freedom to present his material without any concern for the non-human characteristics of the objects of nature being discussed.

This approach to the appreciation of nature found in the Ifá literary corpus underlines the fact that African traditional literature is essentially human. This means that man is the centre of the philosophy around which the literature revolves. Animals, insects, plants and other objects of nature treated in the Ifá literary corpus are therefore presented in human form in order to be able to effect a powerful satire on human culture, moral values and aspirations. When an Ifá poem discusses the greed of the tortoise or the unfaithfulness of the *agbighò* bird, he is merely talking about human greed and human unfaithfulness. In order to make his satire at the same time powerful and dramatic, he chooses an animal or bird with the type of characteristic behaviour which he wants to condemn. This gives his audience the opportunity to laugh at the folly of

the animal concerned without any inhibitions but at last they discover that they have been laughing at themselves when they discover that the objective of the poem is to condemn a human attitude.

#### **d) Ifá As A West African Geomantic System**

Several writers<sup>28</sup> have mentioned the international nature of Ifá as a West African geomantic system. This observation arises from the fact that a system of divination close to Yoruba Ifá could be found among several West African ethnic groups (e.g. among the Ibo, Edo, Jukun, Bariba, Fon, Ewe, Nupe, Igbira etc.) This is not at all surprising in view of the cultural and linguistic similarities that can easily be established among these ethnic groups. The exact nature of the similarity between Ifá and the systems of divination found among the cultures mentioned above is, however, yet to be determined. For example, further research is essential to clarify the following points :

(i) What is the origin of the divination systems found in these cultures? Is the origin linked in any way with Yoruba culture ?

(ii) What is the language employed for the transmission of the divination literature of these cultures? Does the language show any extensive borrowing from Yoruba ?

(iii) Do the present-day priests involved in these divination systems maintain any contacts with their counterparts in Yorubaland? If so, what is the nature of this contact ?

A comprehensive answer to all these questions would involve a lot of research embracing many parts of West Africa. Such an undertaking is also likely to spread over a number of years. The scope of the present work

can therefore not understandably be expected to cover this essentially comparative study.

However, the present investigator has tried to study the Fon divination system in Dahomey in some detail<sup>29</sup> and has arrived at the following tentative hypothesis.

The Fon system of divination known as **Fá** is very close to the Yoruba **Ifá** in many respects :

(i) There is evidence of extensive borrowing from Yoruba both in the names ascribed to the **Odù** and in the repertoire itself.

(ii) The instruments used for divination and the rituals performed by the **Fá** priests are very similar to the Yoruba **Ifá** instruments and rituals.

(iii) Some **Fá** priests claim that they or their teachers learnt the art of divination from **Ifè**. Some of them even claim that they maintain close links with **Ifè**.

As already mentioned, further research is essential to establish the points mentioned above but it would appear from the evidence at our disposal that **Ifè** was in ancient times an international centre of learning for the whole of West Africa. From **Ifè**, knowledge of divination as well as art spread to other parts of West Africa where the cultures concerned fashioned out the knowledge to suit their own cultural, linguistic and philosophical requirements. The case for art has been made quite often but that of divination literature has not received sufficient attention. Yet, it is not surprising that **Ifè** should exert such an influence on other cultures of West Africa given the greatness of Yoruba culture both in terms of mere numbers and the dynamics of its social structure and political organisation.

Despite the West African nature of **Ifá**, it is doubtful if there is any other culture within that geographical area where a system of divination exerts so much



influence on the mythology, beliefs, history and social structure of the people. Viewed from this standpoint, one comes to the inevitable conclusion that Ifá is essentially a Yoruba system. Indeed, Ifá is Yoruba culture in its true philosophical and historical form. What is more, Ifá represents the genius of a pre-literate people to preserve and transmit the ingredients of their own culture despite their inability to read and write.

Finally, the West African nature of Ifá discussed above shows that the links between many West African groups can be observed not only on the linguistic and historical levels but also in the field of folklore. The present writer therefore calls for immediate intensification of research into West African folklore.

## NOTES

1. Yoruba mythology claims that there are 201 or 401 Yoruba divinities. Although this figure cannot be depended upon for an accurate account, there is no doubt that a census of Yoruba divinities would reveal that there are more than a hundred divinities in their pantheon.
2. According to Yoruba mythology, a hen, a camelion and a basket-full of sand were given to the divinities by **Olódùmarè**, the Almighty God. The hen had five fingers on each foot.
3. **Olódùmarè** is the name of the Yoruba High God. He is also known as **Ọlórún** (owner of ọrun i.e. heaven or sky). For detailed discussion see E. Bọlaji Ẹdòwú, **Olódùmarè, God In Yoruba Belief**, Longmans, 1962.
4. **Kétu** is an important Yoruba city now in Dahomey

5. **Şakí.** This is another important Yoruba city on the northwest of Yorubaland. Some myths claim that **Ògún** went to **Ìrè**, a small town in **Èkítì** area, instead of **Şakí**.
6. **Ifón.** An eastern Yoruba town in **Òwò** division of the Western State of Nigeria.
7. **Adó.** There is a controversy in Yoruba folklore as to whether this **Adó** refers to the one in **Èkítì** division or to the one in **Òyó** division.
8. These eight children, according to this myth later became important kings in **Èkítì** and **Òwò** dialect areas.
9. The sixteen sacred palmnuts are known as **ikin**. For full details see pages 12—22.
10. This is why he is known as **ẹlérí ípín** (witness to the act of the choice of destiny).
11. Yoruba traditional society had a four-day week.
12. The cult of **Ifá** worshippers responsible for this is known as **Ìjọ Ọrúnmílà Adúláwò** (The cult of **Ọrúnmílà** for Black People).
13. This part of the training is known as **dídá ọwọ** (using the hands to manipulate the divination instruments).
14. The process of learning how to manipulate the sacred palmnuts so as to arrive at the signature of an **Odù** is known as **ètítẹ alẹ** (Printing of **Ifá** divination marks on the powder of divination). For full details of this process see pages 22—25.
15. This part of the training is known as **ọkarara-ẹbọ** (learning all the full details of the process of performing sacrifices).
16. cf. Wande Abimbola, "Ifá As A Body of Knowledge and As An Academic Discipline," **Lagos Notes and Records**, 2/2, 1968.

17. The two rows of perpendicular marks are made first on the right and then to the left of the Ifá priest. The signature so produced is also read, like Arabic, from right to left.
18. Many Ifá poems end with the words :  
 “Rírú ebọ níí gbeni,  
 Àlírú kii gbèèyàn . . . . .”  
 (Performance of sacrifice brings blessings.  
 Neglect of sacrifice blesses no man).
19. Hence, the following statement contained in **Ọwónrín Méjì** (the sixth Odù of Ifá)  
 “Njẹ kín là mbọ nífẹ ?  
 Ẹnuu wọn,  
 Ẹnuu wọn là mbọ nífẹ.  
 Ẹnuu wọn”.  
 (To what do we offer sacrifices at **Ifẹ** ?  
 It is to the mouths of human beings.  
 It is to their mouths that we offer sacrifices at **Ifẹ**.  
 Their mouths).
- See **Ijìnlẹ Ohùn Ẹnu Ifá**, Apá Kìlíní, Collins, Glasgow, 1968, p. 74.
20. This concept of sacrifice as a form of exchange is fully explained in another Ifá poem contained in **Ijìnlẹ Ohùn Ẹnu Ifá**, Apá Kìlíní, Collins, Glasgow, 1968, pp. 114-115. The poem is taken from a Chapter known as **Ọsá Méjì**, and some of its relevant lines are as follows :  
 A díá fún Ẹlẹpẹ,  
 Wọn ni ó fodidi ẹran pààrọ araa rẹ  
 Nítorí ikú . . . . .  
 Ikú wáá fẸlẹpẹẹ lẹ,  
 Orí ẹran ló mú lọ.

Pààrò paarò, awo ilé Èlẹ̀pẹ̀ . . . . . ”  
 (Ifá divination was performed for Èlẹ̀pẹ̀  
 Who was asked to use an animal in  
 exchange for himself  
 Because of impending death.  
 Death then left Èlẹ̀pẹ̀ unharmed,  
 And took away the animal's head.  
 Exchange-exchange, diviner of Èlẹ̀pẹ̀'s  
 household).

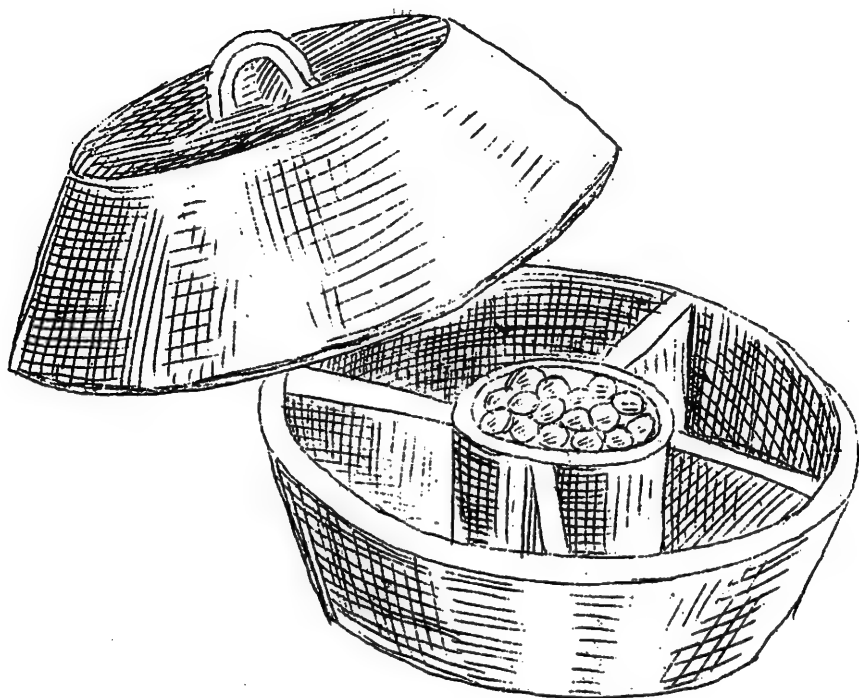
21. cf. W. R. Bascom, *Ifá Divination : Communications Between Gods and Men In West Africa*, Indiana University Press, 1969, p. 60.
22. Wande Abimbola, *Ìjìnlẹ̀ Ohún Ẹnu Ifá, Apá Klíní*, Collins Glasgow, 1968, p. 154, 1. 1-2.
23. Wande Abimbola, *An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Lagos, 1969.
24. *Ibid*, chapter 4.
25. *Ibid*, chapter 5.
26. *Ibid*, chapter 6.
27. *Ibid*, chapter 7.
28. Bascom, pp. 15-25.
29. See Appendix on Informants and Field Methods pp. 463-5.

(a) ỌPỌN IFÁ



Carved Ifá Wooden Tray with the sacred sixteen palmnuts and an image of Èṣù.

**(b) ỌPỌN IFÁ**



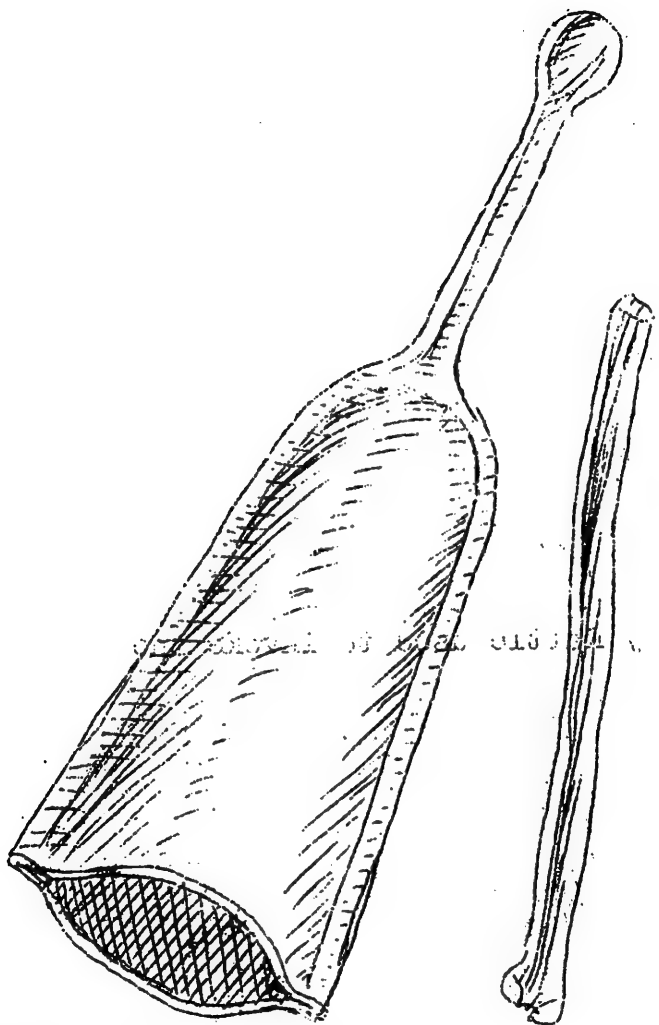
**Carved Ifá wooden bowl with its lid**

(c) ÒPÈLÈ



Divining chain with beads on both ends

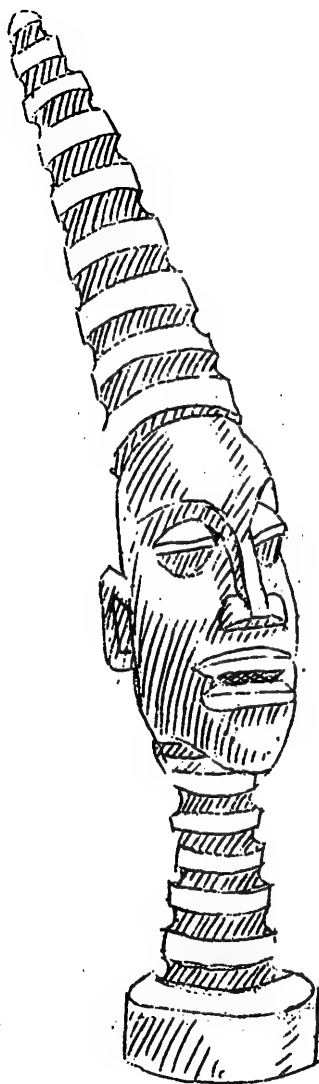
(d) AGOGO



Metal Gong with the wooden stick used to strike it



(e) **ÌRÒKÈ**



Carved ivory object used to invoke the presence of Ifá during the process of divination.

(f) ÀPÒ IFÁ



Ornamented Ifá Bag made of leather

**PART II**

**SIXTEEN GREAT POEMS  
OF IFÁ**

### *i. The Birth of the Ifá Divination System*

This Ifá myth deals with the final return of **Ọ̀rúnmìlà** to **ọ̀run** (heaven) and his replacement here on earth by **ikin** (the sacred palmnuts of divination) which therefore became the most important instrument in the Ifá divination paraphernalia.

The story starts with a time at **Ifẹ** when **Ọ̀rúnmìlà** had no children and his enemies boasted that "father would never have a child in this city of Ifẹ". But his enemies were proved wrong because **Ọ̀rúnmìlà** later had eight children. All the eight children became important kings in several parts of Yorubaland. The first-born son was crowned as **Alára**, king of **Ará**, while the second son was installed as **Ajerò**, king of **Ìjerò**, and the last-born became the **Ọlówọ**, king of the important eastern Yoruba town of **Ọwọ**.

During an important occasion when **Ọ̀rúnmìlà** was celebrating a ritual, he sent for all his eight children who had all become notable chiefs of their own domains. They all responded and paid obeisance to their father saluting him with the words "**àbọ̀rúbọ̀yẹ̀ bọ̀ síṣẹ̀**" (may the rituals be blessed and accepted). But **Ọlówọ**, the last-born of them all, refused to salute their father. Furthermore, he was dressed in exactly the same type of out-fit as **Ọ̀rúnmìlà**, an action which symbolised his rejection of their father's authority and superiority. While all his seven senior brothers bowed one by one before their father, he refused to bow and stood erect. His father asked him to say, "May the sacrifices be blessed and accepted" like his brothers but he refused and said :

"You, **Ọ̀rúnmìlà**, wrap yourself with **ọ̀dùn** cloth.

I, **Ọlówọ** wrap myself with **òdùn** cloth.

You, **Ọrúnmílà**, carry **òsùn** walking-stick made of brass.

I, **Ọlówọ**, carry **òsùn** walking-stick made of brass.

You, **Ọrúnmílà**, wear a pair of brass sandals.

I, **Ọlówọ**, wear a pair of brass sandals.

You, **Ọrúnmílà**, wear a crown.

I, **Ọlówọ**, also wear a crown.

And, it is usually said that

Nobody uses a crowned head to bow down for another person”.

The result of these harsh words, denoting the total rejection of **Ọrúnmílà**'s authority over one of his own children, was that **Ọrúnmílà** became enraged and he snatched away the **òsùn** walking stick held by **Ọlówọ**. This action symbolised the seizure of authority from **Ọlówọ**. **Òsùn** walking-stick is used only by high-ranking **Ifá** priests as a symbol of their authority and superiority. The seizure of it from **Ọlówọ** therefore represented the withdrawal of the authority which **Ọrúnmílà** had given to his children as important priest-rulers.

But **Ọrúnmílà**'s reaction to the foolish action of **Ọlówọ** did not stop there. The filial disobedience of **Ọlówọ** led to the final return of **Ọrúnmílà** to **òrun** (heaven) where he pitched his tent “at the foot of the much-climbed palm-tree which branched here and there and had sixteen hut-like heads”. The result was famine, pestilence, chaos and confusion on earth. This is not surprising since **Ọrúnmílà** represented the principle of order, wisdom, authority, fertility and continuity on the young earth. His departure from the earth therefore led to the collapse of order and continuity. Rain immediately stopped falling. The fertility cycle both in

plants and animals was disrupted, threatenig man and his environment with total extinction.

The inhabitants of the young earth, faced with catastrophe and extinction, clamoured for the return of **Ọrúnmílà**. They called on his children to go and beg their father to return to the earth so that peace, order and continuity might be restored. When the children of **Ọrúnmílà** got to **òrun** (At that time in Yoruba mythology, there wasn't complete physical separation between heaven and earth), they begged their father to return to the earth. They chanted his praise-names and insisted that he should go back with them to his home. But their father bluntly refused to follow them and instead :

“He asked them to stretch their hands forward  
And he gave them the sixteen sacred palm-nuts  
of Ifá divination.

He said, when you get home,  
If you wish to have money,  
That is the person you are to consult . . . .  
If you wish to have wives,  
That is the person you are to consult . . . .  
If you wish to have children,  
That is the person you are to consult . . . .”

Thus, **Ọrúnmílà** replaced himself and his authority with the sixteen sacred palmnuts of Ifá divination known as **ikin**. When he was on the earth, **Ọrúnmílà** himself was the direct link between **òrun** (heaven) and **ayé** (earth). With his final return to **òrun**, and the birth of the sixteen sacred palmnuts, one more intermediary was added to the communication process between the earth and the heavenly powers. Human beings in their communication with **òrun** would therefore have to go from the sixteen sacred palmnuts to **Ọrúnmílà** himself before

plants and animals was disrupted, threatenning man and his environment with total extinction.

The inhabitants of the young earth, faced with catastrophe and extinction, clamoured for the return of **Ọrúnmílà**. They called on his children to go and beg their father to return to the earth so that peace, order and continuity might be restored. When the children of **Ọrúnmílà** got to **ọ̀run** (At that time in Yoruba mythology, there wasn't complete physical separation between heaven and earth), they begged their father to return to the earth. They chanted his praise-names and insisted that he should go back with them to his home. But their father bluntly refused to follow them and instead :

“He asked them to stretch their hands forward  
And he gave them the sixteen sacred palm-nuts  
of Ifá divination.

He said, when you get home,

If you wish to have money,

That is the person you are to consult . . . .

If you wish to have wives,

That is the person you are to consult . . . .

If you wish to have children,

That is the person you are to consult . . . .”

Thus, **Ọrúnmílà** replaced himself and his authority with the sixteen sacred palmnuts of Ifá divination known as **ṣ́kín**. When he was on the earth, **Ọrúnmílà** himself was the direct link between **ọ̀run** (heaven) and **ayé** (earth). With his final return to **ọ̀run**, and the birth of the sixteen sacred palmnuts, one more intermediary was added to the communication process between the earth and the heavenly powers. Human beings in their communication with **ọ̀run** would therefore have to go from the sixteen sacred palmnuts to **Ọrúnmílà** himself before

they could reach the heavenly powers. Thus, the Ifá geomantic system, based on an elaborate paraphernalia of divination and a complex literary corpus, was born. Though **Ọ̀rúnmìlà**, like many of the other Yoruba divinities, finally returned to heaven, he bequeathed to his children and his disciples a divination system through which the Yoruba people believe the wishes of **Olódùmarè** and the other divinities could always be ascertained.

Apá ní gbókoó tan iná oşó,

Orúrù ní wẹ̀wù èjẹ kanlẹ.

Ilẹ̀ ni mo tẹ̀ tẹ̀ tẹ̀

Kí ntóó tọ́pọ̀n.

5 Ọ̀pẹ̀ tẹ́ẹ́rẹ̀ erékẹ̀

Níí yà sí ya búkà mẹ̀rindínlógún.

A díá fún Ọ̀rúnmìlà,

Wọ̀n ní baba ò níí bímọ̀ sọ̀tù Ifẹ̀ yí.

Mo gbọ̀ tíí,

10 Mo rín wọ̀n, rín wọ̀n.

Ìgbà tí ó kọ̀ọ̀ bí,

Ó bí Ọ̀mọ̀-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-fi-ńsàrá,

Òun ni wọ̀n fi joyè Alára.

Ìgbà tí ó tùún bí,

15 Ó bí Ọ̀rà̀n-ọ̀mọ̀-tájọ̀rò,

Òun ni wọ̀n fi joyè Ajerò.

Ìgbà tí ó tùún bí,

Ó bí Ọ̀mọ̀-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-funfun-lára-

gbẹ̀rugbẹ̀ru,

Òun ni wọ̀n fi joyè Ọ̀lọ̀yẹ̀moyin.

20 Ìgbà tí ó tùún bí,

Ó bí Ọ̀mọ̀-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-kégikégi,

Òun ni wọ̀n fi joyè Alákegi.

Ìgbà tí ó tùún bí,



- It is the **apá** tree<sup>1</sup> which thrives in the forest and produces fearful flowers of wizards.
- It is the **orúru**<sup>2</sup> tree which wears a garment of blood from top to bottom.
- It was on the bare ground that I printed Ifá marks  
Before I started using the wooden tray for divination.<sup>3</sup>
- 5 It is the slender palm-tree on hill-top  
Which branches here and there and has sixteen hut-like heads.<sup>4</sup>  
Ifá divination was performed for **Ọ́rúnmílà**.<sup>5</sup>  
It was said that father would never have a child in this city of **Ifẹ**.  
When I heard,
- 10 I laughed and laughed at them.  
When he first had a child,  
He had **Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-fi-nṣará**.<sup>6</sup>  
Who was given the title of **Alára**.<sup>7</sup>  
When he had a child again,
- 15 He had **Ọràn-ọmọ-tájọrò**,<sup>8</sup>  
Who was given the title of **Ajerò**.<sup>9</sup>  
The next time he had a child,  
He had **Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-funfun-lára-gbẹru-gbẹru** <sup>10</sup>  
Who was given the title of **Ọlọyẹmoyin**.<sup>11</sup>
- 20 The next time he had a child,  
He had **Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-kégi-kégi**,<sup>12</sup>  
Who was given the title of **Alákegi**.<sup>12</sup>  
The next time he had a child,

- Ó bí Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-ńsẹgií-tà-lọjà-  
Ejìgbòmẹkùn,
- 25 Ọun ni wọn fi joyè Ọntagi-òlẹlẹ.  
Ìgbà tí ó tùún bí,  
Ó bí Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-ńfẹlùú-tà-lọjà-  
Ejìgbòmẹkùn,  
Ọun ni wọn fi joyè Ẹlẹjẹlúmọpé.  
Ìgbà tí ó tùún bí,
- 30 Ó bí Ìgbà-tí-mo-bímọ-tán-ni-òràn-mí-tóó-gún-  
gégé,  
Ọun ni wọn fi joyè Ọwàràngún-àga.  
Ìgbà tí ó tùún bí,  
Ó bí Ìgbà-tí-mo-bímọ-tán-ni-wọn-ńfọwọ-ọmọ-  
mí,  
wọ-mí,  
Ọun ni wọn fi joyè Olọwọ lótù Ifẹ.
- 35 Ọrúnmilá wáá dájọ ọdún,  
Ó sọ fún gbogbo àwọn ọmọ rẹ méjèjẹ.  
Ojọ ọdún wáá pé.  
Ọrúnmilá sọdún, ọ sọdún kọ,  
Olọwọ náàá sọdún, ọ sọdún kọ.
- 40 Ọrúnmilá fa òsùn idẹ lọwọ.  
Olọwọ náàá fa òsùn idẹ lọwọ.  
Ọrúnmilá bọ sálúbàtà idẹ.  
Olọwọ náàá bọ sálúbàtà idẹ.  
Ọrúnmilá dádé,
- 45 Olọwọ náàá dádé.  
Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-fi-ńsàrá,

He had **Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-ńségi-tà-lọjà-Ejigbòmẹkùn** <sup>41</sup>

- 25 Who was given the title of **Ońtagi-òlélé**.<sup>15</sup>

The next time he had a child,

He had **Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-ńfẹlùú-tà-lọjà-Ejigbòmẹkùn**,<sup>16</sup>

Who was given the title of **Eléjẹlúmòpé**.<sup>17</sup>

The next time he had a child,

- 30 He had **Ìgbà-tí-mo-bímọ-tán-ni-òràn-mí-tóó-gún-gégé**,<sup>18</sup>

Who was given the title of **Ọwàràngún-àga**.<sup>19</sup>

The next time he had a child,

He had **Ìgbà-tí-mo-bímọ-tán-ni-wọn-ńfọwọ-ọmọ-ò-mí-wọ-mí**.<sup>20</sup>

Who was given the title of **Ọlọwọ**<sup>21</sup> in the city of Ifẹ.

- 35 **Ọrúnmìlà** then named a date for a festival,  
And he told all his eight children.

On the day of the festival,

**Ọrúnmìlà** wrapped himself with **òdùn** cloth.<sup>22</sup>

**Ọlọwọ** also wrapped himself with **òdùn** cloth.

- 40 **Ọrúnmìlà** carried in his hand, one **òsùn** staff made of brass.

**Ọlọwọ** also carried in his hand, one **òsùn** staff made of brass.

**Ọrúnmìlà** put on a pair of brass sandals.

**Ọlọwọ** also put on a pair of brass sandals.

**Ọrúnmìlà** put on a crown.

- 45 **Ọlọwọ** also put on a crown.

**Ọrúnmìlà**'s child known as **Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-fi ńsará**,

Tí wọn fi joyè Alára dé,  
Ó ní àbọ́rúbọyè bọ sísẹ.  
Ọràn-ọmọ-tájọ̀rò,

50 Tí wọn fi joyè Ajerò dé,  
Ó ní àbọ́rúbọyè bọ sísẹ.  
Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí tán-ni-mo-funfun-lára-gbẹrugbẹru,  
Tí wọn fi joyè Olọyẹmoyín dé,  
Ó ní àbọ́rúbọyè bọ sísẹ.

55 Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-kégikégi,  
Tí wọn fi joyè Alákegi dé,  
Ó ní àbọ́rúbọyè bọ sísẹ.  
Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-ńsẹgi-tà-lọjà-  
Ejìgbòmẹkùn,  
Tí wọn fi joyè Ońtagi-òlélé dé,

60 Ó ní àbọ́rúbọyè bọ sísẹ.  
Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-ńfẹlùú-tà-lọjà-  
Ejìgbòmẹkùn,  
Tí wọn fi joyè Eléjẹlúmọpé dé,  
Ó ní àbọ́rúbọyè bọ sísẹ.  
Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-ọràn-mí-tóó-gún-gé-gé,

65 Tí wọn fi joyè Ọwàràngún-àgá dé,  
Ó ní àbọ́rúbọyè bọ sísẹ.  
Ìgbà-tí-mo-bímọ-tán-ni-wọn-ńfọwọ-ọmọ-ọ-mí-  
wọ-mí,  
Tí wọn fi joyè Ọlọwọ lótu Ifẹ dé,  
Ó dúró.

Who was given the title of **Alára** arrived,  
And said, "May the sacrifices be blessed and  
accepted".<sup>24</sup>

Ọrúnmìlà's child named **Ọràń-ọmọ-tájọrò**,

- 50 Who was given the title of **Ajerò** arrived,  
And said, "May the sacrifices be blessed and  
accepted".

Ọrúnmìlà's child named **Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-  
funfun-lára-gbẹru-gbẹru**,

Who was given the title of **Ọlọyé moyin** arrived,  
And said, "May the sacrifices be blessed and  
accepted".

- 55 Ọrúnmìlà's child named **Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-  
kégi-kégi**,

Who was given the title of **Alákegi** arrived,  
And said, "May the sacrifices be blessed and  
accepted".

Ọrúnmìlà's child named **Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-  
ńségií-tà-lọjà-Ejìgbòm kùn**,

- 60 Who was given the title of **Ontagi-òlélé** arrived,  
And said, "May the sacrifices be blessed and  
accepted".

Ọrúnmìlà's child named **Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-  
ńfẹlùú-tà-lọjà-Ejìgbòmẹkùn**,

Who was given the title of **Ẹlẹjẹlẹmọpé** arrived,  
And said, "May the sacrifices be blessed and  
accepted".

Ọrúnmìlà's child named **Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-  
ọrààn-mí-tóó-gún-gégé**,

- 65 Who was given the title of **Ọwàràngún-àga** arrived,  
And said, "May the sacrifices be blessed and  
accepted".

Ọrúnmìlà's child named **Ìgbà-tí-mo-bímọ-tán-ni-  
wọn-ńfọwọ-ọmọ-ọ-míí-wọ-mí**,

Who was given the title of **Ọlówọ** in the city of **Ifẹ**  
arrived,

And stood still.

- 70 Ọ̀rúnmílá ní iwọ náà pábọ̀rúbọ̀yẹ̀ bọ̀ ẹ̀sẹ̀.  
 Ó ní òun ò lẹ̀ pábọ̀rúbọ̀yẹ̀ bọ̀ ẹ̀sẹ̀.  
 Ọ̀rúnmílá ní ẹ̀é tí jẹ̀ ?  
 Ọ̀lọ̀wọ̀ ní iwọ Ọ̀rúnmílá sọ̀dùn, o sọ̀dùn kọ̀,  
 Ọ̀un Ọ̀lọ̀wọ̀ náàá sọ̀dùn òún sọ̀dùn kọ̀.
- 75 Ìwọ Ọ̀rúnmílá fòsùn idẹ̀ lọ̀wọ̀,  
 Ọ̀un Ọ̀lọ̀wọ̀ náàá fòsùn idẹ̀ lọ̀wọ̀.  
 Ìwọ Ọ̀rúnmílá bọ̀ sálúbàtà idẹ̀,  
 Ọ̀un Ọ̀lọ̀wọ̀ náàá bọ̀ sálúbàtà idẹ̀.  
 Ìwọ Ọ̀rúnmílá dádé,
- 80 Ọ̀un Ọ̀lọ̀wọ̀ náàá dádé.  
 Bẹ̀ẹ̀ ní wọ̀n sì ní  
 Ẹ̀nikan kii forí adé balẹ̀ fẹ̀nikan.  
 Ní Ọ̀rúnmílá bá bínú,  
 Ó fòsùn idẹ̀ rẹ̀ tu.
- 85 Ní Ọ̀rúnmílá bá kọ̀rí sí idí ọ̀pẹ̀ àgùnká,  
 Èyí tó yà sí ya búkà mẹ̀rìndínlógún.  
 Ló bá di wí pé aboyún ò bí mọ̀,  
 Àgàn ò tọ̀wọ̀ àlà bosùn,  
 Ọ̀kùnrùn ò dide.
- 90 Akérémodòó wẹ̀wù iràwé.  
 Àtọ̀ gbẹ̀ mọ̀ ọ̀mọ̀kùnrin ní idí,  
 Obinrin ò rí àsẹ̀ rẹ̀ mọ̀.  
 Iṣú pẹ̀yin ò ta,  
 Àgbàdó tàpẹ̀ ò gbó.

- 70 **Ọ́rúnmílà** said, “You also, say, “May the sacrifice be blessed and accepted”.
- But he said he could not say, “May the sacrifice be blessed and accepted”.
- Ọ́rúnmílà** asked, “Why is it (that you stand still)?”
- Ọlówọ̀** said, “You **Ọ́rúnmílà** wrap yourself with **ọ̀dùn** cloth.
- I, **Ọlówọ̀**, wrap myself with **ọ̀dùn** cloth.
- 75 You, **Ọ́rúnmílà**, carry **òsùn** walking stick made of brass.
- I, **Ọlówọ̀**, also carry **òsùn** walking stick made of brass.
- You, **Ọ́rúnmílà** wear a pair of brass sandals.
- I, **Ọlówọ̀**, also wear a pair of brass sandals.
- You, **Ọ́rúnmílà**, wear a crown.
- 80 I, **Ọlówọ̀**, also wear a crown.
- And it is usually said that
- Nobody uses a crowned head to bow down for another person”.
- Then, **Ọ́rúnmílà** became angry.
- And he snatched from him his **òsùn** walking stick made of brass.
- 85 **Ọ́rúnmílà** then went to the foot of the much-climbed palm tree.
- Which branched here and there and had sixteen hut-like heads.
- The result was that pregnant women no longer delivered.
- The barren ones remained barren.
- The sick remained infirm.
- 90 Small rivers wore garments of leaves.<sup>25</sup>
- Semen got dried up in men’s testicles.
- Women no longer saw their menstruation.
- New yarm tubers appeared but could not develop.
- Ears of corn came out but they could not become ripe.

- 95 Erèé yojú ọ̀pòlọ.  
 Ọ̀jò páá pàà páá kán silẹ,  
 Àdìẹ sà á mi,  
 A pọn abẹ silẹ,  
 Ewúré mú un jẹ.
- 100 Gbogbo ayé wáà nńwí pé :  
 Nígbà tí Ọ̀rúnmlà m̀bẹ́ láyẹ,  
 Báylí kọ́ layé rí.  
 Ní àwọn ọmọ Ọ̀rúnmlá bá mééjì kẹ́ẹ̀ta,  
 Wọn lọ oko aláwo.
- 105 Wọn ní kí wọn ó réku méjì olùwéré,  
 Kí wọn ọ́ rẹ́ja méjì abíwẹgbàdà,  
 Kí wọn ó rú obídiẹ méjì abẹ̀dọ̀ lùkẹ̀lùkẹ̀,  
 Ewúré méjì abàmú rẹ̀dẹ̀rẹ̀dẹ̀,  
 Ẹ̀nlá méjì tó fiwo sòsùkà.
- 110 Ẫgbà tí wọn rúbọ́ tán,  
 Wọn wáá kọ́rí sí ìdí ọ̀pẹ̀ àgùnká,  
 Èyí tọ́ yà sí ya búkà m̀ẹ̀rìndínlógún.  
 Wọn n̄sẹ :  
 Ifá ká relé o,
- 115 Ọmọ Ẹ̀nìrẹ̀,  
 Ọmọ Ẹ̀nìrẹ̀,  
 Ọmọ ẹ̀nikan sàkà bí àgbọ̀n.



- 95 Beans flowered but could not develop into seeds.  
 Scanty rain drops fell on the ground,  
 Chickens picked them up<sup>26</sup>.  
 Well sharpened knives were placed on the floor,  
 And goats ate them up<sup>27</sup>.
- 100 All the people of the earth were saying :  
 “When **Ọrúnmílà** was on the earth,  
 The earth was not like this”.  
 The children of **Ọrúnmílà** therefore added two  
 cowries to three<sup>28</sup>,  
 And went to an Ifá priest.
- 105 They were asked to perform sacrifice with two  
 fast-moving rats,  
 Two big fish swimming gracefully.  
 They were told to offer two hens with big livers,  
 Two goats with heavy foetus,  
 And two **ẹinlá**<sup>29</sup> cows with horns shaped like  
 head-load pad.
- 110 When they finished performing the sacrifices,  
 They went to the foot of the much-climbed palm-  
 tree.  
 Which branched here and there and had sixteen  
 hut-like heads.  
 They were saying :  
 Ifá, come along to your home.
- 115 Offspring of **Ẹnìrẹ**<sup>30</sup>,  
 Offspring of **Ẹn'rẹ**,  
 Offspring of they who strike suddenly like a sharp  
 object.

- Ifá ká relé o,  
Èwí nílé Adó,
- 120 Ońsà n 'Dẹta,  
Èrinmì lóde Ọwọ.  
Ifá ká relé o,  
Màpó Eléré,  
Mòbà Ọtùn,
- 125 Màpó Ẹlẹjẹlú,  
Gbọlájókòó, ọmọ ọkinkin  
Tíí mériin fọn.  
Ifá ká relé o,  
Ọkùnrin kúkúró òkè Ìgẹtí,
- 130 Gbọlájókòó, ọmọ ọkinkin  
Tíí mériin fọn.  
Ọmọ ọpọlọpọ imọ  
Tíí tú jìàjìà wọdò,  
Ọmọ àşẹşẹ yọ ọgómọ
- 135 Tíí fún nìngín nìngín.  
Ọmọ ejò méjì  
Tíí sáré ganranganran lórí eréwé.  
Ọmọ iná jóko mó jòóòrun,  
Ọmọ iná jóko mó jẹẹlùjù.

- Ifá, come along to your home,  
**Èwí** in the city of **Adó**,<sup>31</sup>
- 120 **Ońsà** in the city of **'Dèta**,<sup>32</sup>  
**Èrínmì** in the city of **Ọwọ**.<sup>33</sup>  
 Ifá, come along to your home,  
**Màpó** in the city of **Eléré**,<sup>34</sup>  
**Mọbà** in the city of **Ọtùn**,<sup>35</sup>
- 125 **Màpó** in the city of **Elẹjẹlú**,  
**Gbólájókòó**,<sup>36</sup> offspring of tusks  
 That make the elephant trumpet.  
 Ifá, come along to your home,  
 The short man of **Ìgẹtí** hill,<sup>37</sup>
- 130 **Gbólájókòó**, offspring of tusks  
 That make the elephant trumpet.  
 Offspring of plenty of palm fronds  
 Which move gracefully with a deep loud noise  
 towards the river.  
 Offspring of new palm fronds
- 135 Which are usually white and tender.  
 Offspring of two snakes  
 Who run fastly on top of trees.  
 Offspring of fire which burns the farm but does  
 not burn **òòrun**.<sup>38</sup>  
 Offspring of fire which burns the farm but leaves  
 the deep part of the forest unburnt.

- 140 Ọrúnmilà ní òun ò tún relé mọ.  
 Ó ní kí wọn ọ tẹwọ.  
 Ọ wáá fún wọn ní ikin mẹrìndínlógún.  
 Ó ní bẹ ẹ bá délé,  
 Bẹ ẹ bá fówóó ní,
- 145 Ẹni tẹẹ mọọ bí nù un.  
 Bẹ ẹ bá délé,  
 Bẹ ẹ bá fáyaá ní,  
 Ẹni tẹẹ mọọ bí nù un.  
 Bẹ ẹ bá délé,
- 150 Bẹ ẹ bá fọmọọ bí,  
 Ẹni tẹẹ mọọ bí nù un.  
 Ilé lẹ bá fẹẹ kọ láyé,  
 Ẹni tẹẹ mọọ bí nù un.  
 Aşọ lẹ bá fẹẹ ní láyé,
- 155 Ẹni tẹẹ mọọ bí nù un.  
 Ire gbogbo tẹ ẹ bá fẹẹ ní láyé,  
 Ẹni tẹẹ mọọ bí nù un.  
 Igbà tí wọn délé,  
 Gbogbo ire náà ní wọn nírí.
- 160 Ọrúnmilà afèdèfẹyọ,  
 Èlààsòdè,  
 Ifá relé Olókun kò dé mọ.  
 Ọ lẹni tẹ ẹ bá rí,  
 Ẹ şá mọọ pè ní baba.

- 140 **Ọrúnmilà** said that he would not return home.  
 He asked them to stretch their hands foward,  
 And he gave them the sixteen sacred palmnuts of  
 Ifá divination.  
 He said, “When you get home,  
 If you wish to have money,
- 145 That is the person you are to consult.  
 When you get home,  
 If you wish to have wives,  
 That is the person you are to consult.  
 When you get home,
- 150 If you wish to have children,  
 That is the person you are to consult.  
 If you wish to have houses on earth,  
 That is the person you are to consult.  
 If you wish to have clothes on earth,
- 155 That is the person you are to consult.  
 All the good things you wish to have on earth,  
 That is the person you are to consult.  
 When they got back home,  
 They started to have all the promised good things.
- 160 **Ọrúnmilà**, speaker of all dialects,  
 Whose nickname is **Èlààsòdè**.<sup>39</sup>  
 Ifá went to the home of **Olókun** <sup>40</sup> but never returned.  
 He said, “The person whom you see, call him  
 father”.<sup>44</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 **Apá** tree. A rain-forest and savanna hard-wood which grows tall like the African teak.
- 2 **Orúrù** tree. A tree which grows wild in many parts of Yorubaland. It sheds off its bark periodically and its flower is bright red.
- 3 Lines 3 and 4 probably refer to a period before the introduction of the divining tray when Ifá divination marks were made on the bare ground. These marks are nowadays printed on the yellow powder of divination known as **iyèròsùn** inside decorated trays of divination. Carved trays are an important aspect of the excellent artistic tradition associated with the Ifá cult.
- 4 Several poems of Ifá refer to the mythical "slender palm-tree" which has sixteen big heads at the foot of which **Òrúnmìlà** finally settled in heaven.
- 5 The question may be asked, "Who performed the Ifá divination referred to in this line for **Òrúnmìlà**?" The answer given by several other myths is that when **Òrúnmìlà** was on earth, he had several disciples including his eight children to whom he exposed the secrets of Ifá divination. It is therefore conceivable that the divination referred to above was performed for **Òrúnmìlà** by one of his own disciples. Several other poems actually mention the names of some of these Ifá priests of **Òrúnmìlà** who are sometimes referred to as the "resident priests of the household of **Òrúnmìlà**" ("awo ilé **Òrúnmìlà**").
- 6 **Omọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-fi-ńsará**. A personal name meaning: "It was after I had children that I can boast of having close relations". Such a name is

given to the first child of a person who lacked close relations and who cherishes the fact that now that he has started to have children, he would no longer lack close associates.

- 7 **Alará.** An important title among Ifá priests. This is also the title of the king of **Ìlára** and **Arámọkọ** in **Èkitì** area of the Yoruba country.
- 8 **Ọràn-omọ-tájorò.** A personal name meaning : “The matter of children deserves close scrutiny and deliberation (among those concerned with their welfare)”.
- 9 **Ajerò.** Another important title among Ifá priests. It is also the official title of the king of **Ìjerò**, one of the most famous natural rulers of **Èkitì**.
- 10 **Omọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-funfun-lára-gbẹru-gbẹru.** This is also a personal name which means: “It was after I delivered a child that my body became white all over”.
- 11 **Olóyémoyin.** The title of the king of **Oyé**, a town in **Èkitì** division of Yorubaland.
- 12 **Omọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-kégi-kégi.** Another personal name meaning : “It was after I had a child that I started cutting firewood persistently”. This name refers to a tradition which still persists in several rural areas of Yorubaland where the most important source of energy to make domestic fire for cooking and warming the house during the cold season is derived mainly from firewood. It is the duty of the husband as head of the family to fetch firewood for his wife to warm the house especially when she has just delivered a child.
- 13 **Alákegi.** An obscure title.
- 14 **Omọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-ńségií-tà-lójà-Ejigbòme-kùn.** This is a personal name which means: “It

- was after I had children that I started to fetch firewood for sale in **Ẹjìgbòmẹ̀kùn** market”.
- 15 **Ọ́ntagi-òlẹ́lẹ́**. The title of the king of **Ìtagi**, a small town in **Ẹ̀kitì** area.
  - 16 **Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-ńfẹ̀lùú-tà - lójà - Ẹjìgbòmẹ̀kùn**. A personal name which means : “It was after I had a child that I started to fetch indigo leaves for sale in the market of **Ẹjìgbòmẹ̀kùn**”. This name refers to the importance of indigo as a Yoruba dye-stuff.
  - 17 **Ẹlẹ̀jẹlúmọ̀pẹ́**. The title of the paramount ruler of the town of **Ìjẹlú**.
  - 18 **Ìgbà-tí-mo-bímọ-tán-ni-ọ̀rààn-mí-tóó-gún-gégé**. A personal name meaning : “It was after I had a child that my problems were straightened out (i.e. my life became pleasant)”.
  - 19 **Ọwàràgún-àga**. An important title among Ifá priests.
  - 20 **Ìgbà-tí-mo-bímọ-tán-ni-wọ̀n-ńfọ̀wọ-ọmọ-ọ-mí-wọ-mí**. Another personal name meaning : “It was after I delivered children that people started to respect me because of my children”.
  - 21 **Ọlówọ**. The title of the king of **Ọ̀wọ**, one of the most important Yoruba natural rulers.
  - 22 **Ọ̀dùn** cloth. An ancient Yoruba cloth part of which is made of raffia.
  - 23 **Ọ̀sùn** staff. This sacred staff which is the symbol of a god known by the same name is carried only by important Ifá priests as a walking stick. It is forbidden for anybody to place the staff on the ground sideways, it must always be found in an erect position. Hence, the saying : “**Òdòró gangan là á bósùn**” (“**Ọ̀sùn** is always found in an erect



- position"). This sacred staff is therefore usually placed against the wall at the corner of the house.
- 24 "May the sacrifice be blessed and accepted". A prayer formula said by anyone who meets Ifá priests in the process of divination. It is also used as an ordinary greeting by Ifá priests among themselves.
- 25 "Small rivers wore garments of leaves". This is a metaphoric way of saying: "When small rivers dried up, leaves from trees along their banks, covered up their courses".
- 26 Chickens picked up the rain-drops because they thought they were grains.
- 27 Chickens picked up the sharpened knives probably because of their whiteness which may, to an animal, resemble a white, edible material such as cassava or yams.
- 28 Cowries were used by the Yoruba as money since they were introduced into West Africa by the Portuguese. A person going to an Ifá priest for divination must carry some cowries (nowadays, he must have coins) to which he communicates his wishes and then drops the cowries on the divination instruments. It is believed that after he has done that he (the client) has communicated the wishes of his **Orí** (guardian and personal spirit) to **Òrúnmìlà** who will then speak to him during the divination process through the Ifá priest who is **Òrúnmìlà's** mouthpiece.
- 29 **Ẹ̀nlá**. A type of short-horned cow. They are usually not as tall as the long-horned ones.
- 30 **Ẹ̀nírẹ̀**. This name, the meaning of which is obscure, forms a prominent part of the usual salute to **Òrúnmìlà**.
- 31 **Ẹ̀wí** is the title of the King of **Adó**, an important

- town of Èkìtì area. This title is given here to Òrúnmìlà as a praise-name.
- 32 **Ońsà** is an important Òyó title. **Ońsà** is rated second to the **baálẹ̀** of most Òyó villages. This title is used here as a praise-name of Òrúnmìlà.
  - 33 **Èrinmì** which is an Òwò title which is used here as a praise-name of Òrúnmìlà.
  - 34 **Mápó**, a title in the obscure village of **Eléré**, is used here as a praise-name for Òrúnmìlà.
  - 35 **Mòbà** is an important title in Òtùn, a well-known northern Èkìtì town. This title is given here to Òrúnmìlà as a praise-name.
  - 36 **Gbólájókòó**. A personal name which means: "He who sits up honour (like a human being)".
  - 37 **Ìgẹ́tí** hill is believed to be the place where Òrúnmìlà settled at **Ifẹ̀** when the gods (**òrìṣà**) first arrived on the earth.
  - 38 **Òòrun**. The bare wood that remains after a savanna forest is burnt down. This is collected and sold in the market and used for making fire. **Òòrun** can be used to make fire very quickly because of its softness.
  - 39 **Èlààsòdè**. A praise-name of Òrúnmìlà which means **Èlà** of the city of **Ìsòdè**. The word **Èlà** alone is often used as a nickname of Òrúnmìlà.
  - 40 "Home of **Olókun**" here refers to **òrun**. **Olókun** is the Yoruba goddess of the sea.

## ii. The Mythology of the Vulture and How He Became A King

The vulture is regarded by the Yoruba as a sacred bird and it is forbidden for anybody to kill or eat it. Many poems of Ifá centre around the vulture explaining its place in Ifá divination sacrifice. Many Yoruba prose narratives also deal with the vulture explaining, for example, why it has a bald head.

The importance of the vulture to Ifá divination sacrifice is summarised by the following excerpt from a chapter in the Ifá literary corpus :

“Bá ò rí gúnugún,  
A à yóó lè şẹbọ;  
Bá ò rákàlà,  
A ò şorò . . . . .  
Igún wáá jẹbọ,  
Kẹbọ ó lè baà fín.  
Ètìé, wáá jẹbọ,  
Kẹbọ ó lè baà dà . . . .  
Igún, ètìé, aráà 'Lódè”.<sup>1</sup>

If we do not see the vulture,  
We will not be able to perform sacrifice.  
If we do not see àkàlà,<sup>2</sup>  
We will not be able to perform any ritual.  
Vulture, come and eat a sacrifice,  
So that the sacrifice may be accepted.  
Ètìé,<sup>3</sup> come and eat a sacrifice,  
So that the sacrifice may be blessed.  
Vulture, nicknamed ètìé, offspring of Ìlódè.<sup>4</sup>

One of the most important reasons for the central place occupied by the vulture in Ifá divination is men-

tioned in the preceding poem. The vulture eats up sacrifices performed by Ifá priests, placed on shrines at road junctions or in any other place deemed suitable. In Yoruba belief, if a sacrifice placed in a particular place is not eaten up, it is a sign that it has not been accepted by the gods. Since the vulture helps in fulfilling this purpose, it is not surprising that Ifá priests regard it as a sacred bird.

The vulture is also regarded as a symbol of old age since both young and old vultures have bald heads and move clumsily about like sick birds. Furthermore, since one of the things most valued in life by the Yoruba is old age, it is not surprising that the vulture is sacred to them.

The following poem tells the myth of the origin of the vulture. The myth links the vulture's origin with **Ẹfọn Aláayè** whose king carries the title of **Aláayè**. It also links its history with old **Ọyó** and finally with **Olórée-àgbọ́n** who is regarded as one of the most important ancestors of **Ọràngún**, the king of **Ìlá**. This is probably why the vulture is regarded as a sacred bird to the ruling family of **Ìlá**.

The story says that **Ẹluùlú**, **Igún** (the vulture) and another important bird known as **èrìwò** were brothers. After the death of their father, **Ẹluùlú** was appointed as the successor to the title of **Olórée-àgbọ́n** since the vulture because of his clumsy ways was taken for a sick person and **Èrìwò** was blind. But when **Ẹluùlú** was killed in an accident caused by his own greed, there was no other alternative but to install the vulture into the traditional title of their father.

The point of this story seems to be to prove that the vulture is indeed the king of all birds since he is related by his origin to two sons of **Odùduwà** (i.e. **Ọràngún**,

king of **Ìlá** and **Aláàfin**, king of **Ọyọ**) in addition to his original ancestor — **Aláayè**, king of **Ẹfọn Aláayé**. The story by linking the vulture with these three important Yoruba kings, also shows why it is regarded as a sacred bird by the Yoruba people. In other words, the Yoruba must not kill or eat the vulture because it is connected with their own ancestry.

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1. Wande Abimbola, *Ìjinlẹ̀ Ohùn Ẹnu Ifá*, Apá Kííní, Collins, Glasgow, 1968, pp. 143—144.
  2. **Àkàlà**. The ground hornbill. This bird is also of ritual importance to the Yoruba.
  3. **Ẹ̀tíẹ̀**. Another name for the vulture.
  4. **Ìlódè**. A place in Ilé-Iḿẹ̀ believed to be the original home of the vulture.

- Eşinşín bà sóri igbá ọtí,  
 Wọn a şedí rẹbẹjan rẹbẹjan.  
 Dífá fún Aláayè,  
 Ọmọ Agúnpopofóşomu.
- 5 Olóyè ni.  
 Ènìyàn, obìnrin Aláayè ni.  
 Àrùwẹ, obìnrin Aláayè ni.  
 Aláayèé sì tún lẹşìin kan.  
 Ènìyàn ò bí,
- 10 Àrùwẹ ò bí.  
 Abo eşin Aláayè náà ò lóyún.  
 Ó pe àwọn babaláwo.  
 Wọn ní Aláayè,  
 Wọn ní àgbá ewúré ni o rú.
- 15 Ngbòó rúbọ tán.  
 Wọn mú okùn eji inú àgbá ewúré,  
 Wọn fi gágùúnmu f'Aláayè.  
 Ọ sá a 'érí àtìbàbà,  
 Ọ lọ òde.
- 20 Ènìyán gbàgbé, ó loodò.  
 Àrùwẹ gbàgbé, ó loodò.  
 Eşin Aláayèé sì já.  
 Ìjá tí ọ jáá, ìdí àgúnmu lọ kọrí sí,  
 Ọ dà á nù.

The fly perches on the calabash cup of palm-wine,  
It shoots out its abdomen.

Ifá divination was performed for Aláayè, <sup>1</sup>

Offspring of Agúnpopofóšómu. <sup>2</sup>

- 5 He was a chief.

Ēniyàn <sup>3</sup> was Aláayè's wife.

Àrùwé <sup>4</sup> was also Aláayè's wife.

Aláayè also had one horse.

Ēniyàn had no child.

- 10 Àrùwé also had no child.

The female horse of Aláayè also had no issue.

He called on Ifá priests

Who divined for him and told him

To perform sacrifice with two hundred goats.

- 15 After he had performed the sacrifice,

They took part of the intestine of a goat,

And with it they prepared àgúnmu <sup>5</sup> for him.

Aláayè dried the medicine on top of a wooden  
booth.

And went out.

- 20 Ēniyàn, (Aláayè's wife), forgot to remove the  
medicine, she went to draw water from the river.

Àrùwé, (the other wife of Aláayè), also forgot, and  
she also went to draw water from the river.

Aláayè's horse cut itself loose,

And went to the place where the medicine was  
kept.

The horse kicked the medicine and scattered it  
about.

- 25 N'ńlá a lówó l'Èniyán dé.  
 Àrùwẹ náàá dé.  
 Káì ! È ẹ wẹsin ọkọọ wa,  
 Àgúnmu tó fowó gún fún wa.  
 Káì, kàì, kàì.
- 30 Wọn lé e kúò mbẹ.  
 Kí wọn ó lé e kúò mbẹ.  
 Èniyán șa diẹ 'ówó.  
 Àrùwẹ náàá șa diẹ 'ówó.  
 Tóò ! Wọn bá lá a.
- 35 Oşúú lé, Àrùwẹ ò róde ẹ mọ.  
 Èniyàn ò róde ẹ mọ.  
 Àşẹsin náàá lóyún.  
 Ònká şikewàá,  
 Ìgbà t'Èniyàn ó bì,
- 40 Èniyán bí méjì.  
 Àrùwẹ ní hààà !  
 Ọ lówó hàn.  
 Ọ l'Áláayè,  
 Ó ní ònkààn rẹ yíi ọ wáá dùn mọ,
- 45 Bójú ọmọ tí pọn ọ tó yíi,  
 Èniyán kúnlẹ, ó bí méjì.



- 25 While the horse was licking the medicine, **Ẹ̀nìyàn** arrived.  
**Àrùwẹ́** also arrived.  
 They shouted, “ **Káì,**<sup>s</sup> look at our husband’s horse  
 Licking the medicine he spent his money to pre-  
 pare for us”.  
 They shouted at the horse, “**Káì, Kàì, Káì**”
- 30 And drove it away.  
 When they had driven it away from the medicine,  
**Ẹ̀nìyàn** picked up some of it.  
**Àrùwẹ́** also picked up some of the medicine,  
 And they licked it.
- 5 When the new moon appeared, **Àrùwẹ́** did not see  
 her menstruation.  
**Ẹ̀nìyàn** did not see her menstruation.  
 The horse was also pregnant.  
 In the tenth month by inclusive counting,  
 When **Ẹ̀nìyàn** had a child,
- 40 She had twin babies.  
**Àrùwẹ́** shouted with great exclamation  
 That a fairy was born.  
 She called on **Aláayè** and said,  
 “Your affairs are no longer pleasant.
- 45 You, who had been in want of children for long,  
 Your wife knelt down and delivered two babies.,

Ta lọ gbọ tó bímọ méjì rí o o ?  
Ọ ọ yaa lọọ ko dànù.  
Mọ kòó wa tà,

- 50 Mọ kòó wa fọba.  
    Ngbàa 'lẹ é e mọ,  
    Aláayèè lọọ bọmọ mọlẹ.  
    Ó bo méjèèjì mọlẹ.  
    Ngbà tẹsin Aláayè ó ẹ, ní nńọbí.
- 55 Ní bá nńọbí nńọ kejì.  
    Ngbà tí ó bí, méjì ló bí.  
    Àrùwẹ ní hààà !  
    Ọ lórọọ tún hàn o.  
    Aláayè, mọ jẹẹnikan ọ gbọ.
- 60 Mọ ko a tà.  
    Wọn tún lọọ bò ó mọlẹ.  
    Ngbà Àrùwẹ náà ó ọ kúnlẹ tí ó bí,  
    Mẹta ló bí.  
    Ọmọ mẹtá ní Àwùrẹ náàá bí.
- 65 Ngbà tí ọ dá ẹ, tí ọ là ẹ,  
    Tóó ! Aláayèè tún nńwágbá tí ó kòó ọmọ sí.  
    Hiin, ó ní mọ kòó ọmọ toun o.  
    Ó ní nńtorí pé toun bá tára ẹ tán,  
    Ọba tá wọn nńpé kọ gbọdọ gbọ, kọ gbọdọ gbọ,

Have you ever heard anybody say that he has given birth to two babies ?<sup>6</sup>

You are advised to go quickly and throw them away.

Don't sell us into slavery.

50 Don't put us under the king's wrath".

As a result, before day-break,

**Aláayè** went and buried the babies.

He buried both of them.

Soon after, **Aláayè's** horse fell 'n labour.

55 It fell in labour on the second day.

When the horse delivered, it had two issues.

**Àrùwé** shouted again with a loud noise and said, "Another set of fairies is born.

**Aláayè**, don't let anybody hear.

60 Don't sell us into slavery".

The result was that they went and buried them.

But when **Àrùwé** herself knelt down to deliver,

She delivered three children.

**Àrùwé** had three children.

65 After some time and at last,

**Aláayè** took up his calabash with which he would gather the children.

But **Àrùwé** told him not to take her own children away.

She said that after she cleaned herself properly,

She would go to the king whom they were saying must not know,

- 70 Ó lóun ọ kọmọ toun dọdọ ọba.  
 Àrùwẹ tára ẹe tán, ọ kọmọ ẹ,  
 Ó dilé ọba.  
 Káábíèsí.  
 Ọbá ní hòo, nílé o.
- 75 Ó ní 'un toun rí rẹe o.  
 N toun rí rẹe o.  
 Ó ní ígbà obí ntẹun láàárọ yí,  
 Lòun bá bímọ o.  
 Ígbò 'un ọ kà á, lọ jẹ mẹta o.
- 80 Àwọn Erí-ẹsin-níi-kún-bí-igbó-bí-igbó,  
 Awo ọba,  
 Ló dífá fỌba lóde Ọyọ,  
 Ọba ísunkún òun ò rífà jẹ.  
 Wọn ní lódún ọdún níi lódún ifàa rẹẹ pé.
- 85 Ọbá ní hààà !  
 Ohun tí àwọn babaláwo wí ẹ.  
 Ó ní yàrá nù un, mọọ gbébẹ.  
 Ọjá mẹta níi,  
 Ọkẹ mẹta níi,
- 90 Ó fún un lókẹẹ mẹta mẹta ọnà mẹta.  
 Ó ní mọọ womọọ rẹ.  
 Ọmọ Ẹsù ẹẹ gbèè dàgbà.

- 70 She said that she would take her own children to him.  
 Àrùwé cleaned up herself, took her children,  
 And went to the king's palace.  
 She saluted the king,  
 The king answered her.
- 75 She narrated her story to the king.  
 She said that she had the following story to tell.  
 She said that in the morning of that day, she fell in labour,  
 And consequently delivered.  
 But when she counted the children, they were three in number.
- 80 The priests named, Erí-ṣṣin-níí-kún-bí-igbó-bí-igbó,<sup>7</sup>  
 Ifá priests of the king,  
 Performed Ifá divination for the king in the city of Òyó<sup>8</sup>  
 When the king was weeping because he had no free gifts.  
 They told him that that particular year was his year of free gifts.
- 85 The king shouted with a loud exclamation  
 Saying that the prediction of the Ifá priests have come to pass.  
 He said, "That is your room, live there.  
 Here are three pieces of cloth belts.  
 Here are three òkẹ<sup>9</sup> measures of cowries".
- 90 And he gave her three times three òkẹ.  
 He told her to start caring for her children.  
 The children of Èṣù do not take a long time to develop.

- Omọ Àruwẹ wọn.  
 Ó ní bóo lo ó tí sọ yí ?
- 95 Ó léyìí ọ mọọ jẹ Àákọọsìn-Alàgbà.  
 Ó léyìí ñkọ, bóo lo ó tí sọ ?  
 Ó ní ọ mọọ j'Óndòó-àgbọ.  
 Ó ní bóo lo ó tí sọ ẹkẹta ?  
 Ó ní Olórèé-àgbọ nù un,
- 100 Tisàlẹ-ọjà,  
 Omọ Èsù èé gbèé dàgbà.  
 Nígbà tí ó parí oşù méjìlá tíí jòdún,  
 Àwọn omọ tí dọkùnrin.  
 Wọn múkan lọọ 'rú Aáwẹ,
- 105 Wọn wadi yí i ká.  
 Wọn múkan lọọ 'rúu 'Mọ́ọ́rìn,  
 Wọn wadi yí i ká.  
 Wọn múkan lọọ 'rúu 'Lọ́ọ́rá,  
 Wọn wadi yí i ká.
- 110 Àwọn Páńsíki-n-wọ́ọ́n-sínwó-erí-  
 wọ́jọwọ́jọ-là-á-sínkùn-ọlà,  
 A dífá fún Àákọọsìn-Alàgbà,  
 Nígbà tí ñsunkún  
 Òun ò lénìyàn.  
 Wọn ní kó rúbọ ẹyẹlé mẹwàá,

Àrùwé weaned her children.

The king asked, "What name will you give to this one?"

- 95 She said, "That one should be called **Àákọ́sìn**,<sup>10</sup> the old one".

The king asked again, "What about this one, what name do you want to give him?"

She said, "That one should be called **Ońdòóàgbọ̀n**,<sup>11</sup>

The king asked, "What name will you give to the third one?"

She said, "That one is to be known as **Olórèéàgbọ̀n**,<sup>12</sup>

- 100 He who dwells in the slope of the market".

The children of **Èṣù** do not take a long time to develop.

Before the end of twelve months, which make up one year,

The children had become fully grown-up.

They took one of them to a place like **Aáwé**,<sup>13</sup>

- 105 And dug a moat<sup>16</sup> round his settlement.

They took another one to a place like '**Mòfòrìn**,<sup>14</sup>

And dug a moat round his settlement.

They took the third one to a place like '**Lọ̀ọ̀rá**,<sup>15</sup>

And dug a moat round the settlement.

- 110 The Ifá priests named, **Páńṣíkí-páńṣíkí-n-wọ́ń-sínwo-erí-wọ̀jòwọ̀jọ-là-á-sínkùn-ọ̀là**,<sup>16</sup>

Performed Ifá divination for **Àákọ́sìn-alàgbà**,

When he was weeping.

Because of lack of comrades.

He was asked to perform sacrifice with ten pigeons,

- 115 Egbàá mệwàá.  
 Ó sì rúbọ.  
 Ìgbà tí yóò rúbọ tán,  
 Ó dọlọmọ.  
 Àwọn Òòsà-tó-múnú-ẹjò-gbọpọ-  
 Ló-fitan-ẹja-gbájeree-'dẹ,
- 120 A dífá fún Onídòóàgbọn,  
 Ñgbà tí ñsunkún.  
 Òun ò lóbìnrin.  
 Wọn ní ó rúbọ.  
 Ó rúbọ.
- 125 Ñgbà tí yóò rúbọ tán nìí,  
 Ó dolóbìin.  
 Ó bímọ.  
 Ó di pé ọ dọba ńnúù 'lú.  
 Gbòngbò-òná-jẹ-kí-elẹsẹ-ó-rìn-  
 gbogbo-ayé-gbogbo-kíí-ẹ-é-lẹşin
- 130 A dífá fún Olórèéàgbọn,  
 Tìsàlẹ ọjà,  
 Ñgbà tí ñsunkún òun ò rọmọ bí.  
 Wọn ní ó rúbọ.  
 Ñgbòó rúbọ tán,
- 135 Ó bèrẹ síí bímọ.  
 Ìgbà tí ọ kọọ bí,  
 Ó bí 'Gúnnugún.



- 115 And ten times two thousand cowries  
 He performed the sacrifice.  
 After he had performed the sacrifice,  
 He had children.  
 The Ifá priests named, **Òòṣà-tó-múnú-ẹjò-gbópò-  
 ló-ṣítan-ẹja-gbájeere-d?**,<sup>19</sup>
- 120 Performed Ifá divination for **Ońdòòàgbòn**,  
 When he was weeping  
 Because he had no wife.  
 He was asked to perform sacrifice.  
 He performed it.
- 125 After he had performed sacrifice,  
 He had a wife.  
 He had children.  
 He became a king in the town.  
 The Ifá priest named, **Gbòngbò-òná-jé-kí-ẹlẹsẹ-ó-rìn-  
 gbogbo-ayé-gbogbo-kíí-ṣeé-lẹṣin**,<sup>18</sup>
- 130 Performed Ifá divination for **Olórèèàgbòn**.  
 He who dwells in the slope of the market,  
 When he was weeping because he had no child.  
 He was asked to perform sacrifice.  
 After he had performed sacrifice,
- 135 He started to have children.  
 The first time he had a child,  
 He had **Gúnnugún**.<sup>19</sup>

Ìgbà tí ó tùún bí,  
Ó bÈrìwò.

140 Ìgbà tí ó bìi,  
Ó bÈluùlú òkètaa wọn.  
Ó wáá di pógbo gbóó gbó,  
Ó fọjọ sàisí.  
Òpóó 'lé wó, òkùtẹ yẹ,

145 Omi agbadá yí dànù.  
Ta la á wàá fi lédù oyè báyii o ?  
Araa 'Gún ni ọ dá ií,  
Èrìwò ò rína.  
Èluùlú ní m̀bẹ lẹyìn tọ dá sákáşáká,

150 Gbájúmọ sì ni.  
Wọn lÈluùlú,  
Ìwọ làwọn ó fi joyè,  
Gbajúmọ ni ọ,  
Ó loun gbà bẹẹ.

155 Ó mééjì kẹ́ẹta,  
Ọ lọ ọdọ àwọn aláwo.  
Ọ lọ ọdọ àwọn Tawo lònà-tawo-ni-pápá.  
È yẹun lọ́ọkaàn 'bò wo.  
Wọn lÈluùlú,

The next time he had a child,  
He had **Èrìwò**.<sup>20</sup>

- 140 The next time he had a child,  
He had **Èluùlú**<sup>21</sup> as his third child.  
He became old,  
And one day, he died.  
The pillar of the house collapsed, the supporting  
pole gave way.

- 145 The water inside the broken pot spilled over.  
They wondered who would be the next king.  
**Igún** was not healthy,  
And **Èrìwò**, his brother, was blind.  
Only **Èluùlú**, the last one, was healthy and strong.

- 150 He was a famous person in the community.  
They said, “**Èluùlú**, look here,  
It is you whom we are going to install as our king.  
You are a famous person”.  
**Èluùlú** also said that he agreed with them.

- 155 He added two cowries to three,  
And went to Ifá priests.  
He went to the Ifá priests named **Tawo-lònà-tawo-  
ni-pápá**.<sup>22</sup>  
He asked them to divine for him.  
They said, “**Èluùlú**, look here,

- 160 Wọn ní háà !  
 Wọn ní un tí 'ọn fẹ́ẹ́ fí ọ̀ ẹ̀ ẹ̀ yìi,  
 Wọn ní nkaan re ni.  
 Àmọ̀ aṣọ̀ pupa gbòò araà re,  
 Wọn ní n náà lẹ̀bọ̀.
- 165 Èluùlú ní ẹ̀wù tò ẹ̀ pé bóun bá dórí oyè,  
 N náà lòún ọ̀ mọ̀ ẹ̀ ẹ̀ ẹ̀ ẹ̀.  
 Òun ò lẹ̀ fíyíun rúbọ̀ ọ̀.  
 Kọ̀ yà sí.  
 Kọ̀ dá ẹ̀, ọ̀ là ẹ̀,
- 170 Wọn fÈluùlú,  
 Wọn ẹ̀ lédù oyè.  
 Ní 'ọn bá gbé ẹ̀ lẹ̀ ẹ̀ ẹ̀.  
 Kí wọn ọ̀ páwọn ọ̀ mọ̀ ẹ̀ ẹ̀  
 Ìwòhà, ìwòpápá fún un,
- 175 Èsú ní oriin rẹ̀ ẹ̀ ẹ̀ ẹ̀ ẹ̀.  
 Ó ní, "A mÈluùlú jolórèé ọ̀ ọ̀,  
 Tawo lònà.  
 Tawo ní pápá ọ̀ ọ̀,  
 Tawo lònà.
- 180 A fÈluùlú jolórèé ọ̀ ọ̀,  
 Tawo lònà,  
 Tawo ní pápá ọ̀ ọ̀,

- 160 Háà ! We are afraid.  
 The position in which they are going to place you,  
 Is a good position.  
 But that bright-red cloth on you  
 Is what you are to offer for sacrifice.
- 165 Èluùlú refused saying that he could not offer for  
 sacrifice the cloth which he would be using on  
 the throne  
 To reign in majesty.  
 He said he could not offer that particular cloth for  
 sacrifice.  
 He neglected the prescribed sacrifice.  
 After some time, at the appropriate moment,
- 170 They took Èluùlú,  
 And presented him to the gods as king.  
 They took him to the farmland outside the town.  
 As they were about to sing saying  
 “Ìwohà, ìwonpápá” for him,
- 175 Èṣù said that is not the appropriate song.  
 He asked them to say, “We install Èluùlú as Olórèé,  
 The road belongs to Ifá priest.  
 The open field belongs to Ifá priest.  
 The road belongs to Ifá priest.
- 180 We install Èluùlú as Olórèé,  
 The road belongs to Ifá priest.  
 The open field belongs to Ifá priest.

Tawo lònà”.

Ìgbà tí ọ yá lẸluùlú,

185 Ibi tí ’òn sì ti ñgbòmọyèé kọrùn ní.

Ìgbà tẸluùlú ó wonú oko lẹhùún,

Ló rirẹ ní ñtafà báyií lérí okùn.

Ó ní ẹ sọun kalẹ.

Wọn ní ọmọyè èé sọ,

190 Ẹu láwọn lérí.

Ó ní òun ọ gbọdọ ẹu lée yín lérí,

Ó ní bẹ ẹ bá tètè sọun kalẹ,

Ẹjẹẹ yín lòún ọ tẹ wọlé.

Wọn bá sẸluùlú,

195 Wọn bá sọ ọ kalẹ.

Ẹsú ní ẹ sọ ọ kalẹ.

Bẹẹ ló ẹe bọọ ’gbó.

Bẹẹ ló ẹe lọọ bá irẹ,

Tí ’òn fi kẹ okùn.

200 Kọ lọọ bá irẹ tí ’òn fi kẹ okùn,

Ẹàkà tí ó ẹa,

Ìlé mú un ’ún ’lẹ.

Alaro nǹ lójú ọnà,

Óndùndún, ónsẹkẹrẹ, onrara.

The road belongs to Ifá priest.”

After some time, **Ẹ̀luùlú** said : . . . . .

185 And at that time people used to carry newly  
installed kings on their shoulders.

When **Ẹ̀luùlú** looked into the open field,

He saw a cricket struggling on the ropes.

He asked them to drop him down.

But they said it was forbidden for them to drop  
him.

190 They told him that if he wanted to excrete he should  
excrete on their heads.

He answered that it was improper for him to excrete  
on their heads,

But he warned that if they did not drop him in  
time,

He would kill them and step on their blood before  
he entered the palace.

They therefore dropped **Ẹ̀luùlú**.

195 They dropped him down.

**Ẹ̀ṣù** said, “Drop him down”.

That was how he entered into the forest,

And he went to meet the cricket,

Which had been used as a decoy over the ropes.

200 As soon as he got to the cricket,

He struck at it,

And he was caught immediately in the ropes.

All the drummers waited anxiously on the road  
including the **alaro**<sup>23</sup>,

The **dùndún**<sup>24</sup> and **ṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀**<sup>25</sup> drummers and **ràrà**<sup>26</sup>  
artists.

- 205 “Ó nilè dèrèrè  
 Jòò jàre o o ò,  
 Ìlè dèrèrè jòò dákun.  
 À nsèsè ngbé mi lòmoyèé bò.  
 Ìlè dèrèrè jòò dákun”.
- 210 Ìlè dèrèrè ní wọn firè sọun ní.  
 Ó ní òun ò níí jòò.  
 M̀bè ló ti daşo pupa araa rẹ borí,  
 Lọ bá kúú bẹ.  
 Ní ọn bá lọọ yẹ ẹ wò.
- 215 Wọn ní ẹyin ò rí bí o,  
 Àwọn sì láwọn ọ tẹ lé e,  
 Ọ láwọn ọ dúó lójú ọnà.  
 Èluùlú ló fi ọkánjùà pa araa rẹ yí o.  
 Wọn ní bó ti níí şeraa rẹ ló şeraa rẹ,
- 220 Ẹ ñsọ òlẹ,  
 Ẹ jáwọn ọ lọọ gbé 'Gún.  
 Wọn ní Gún táraa rẹ ọ dá.  
 Wọn ní bó bá dẹrí oyè,  
 Wọn ní báun kí ọ mọ rí mọ.
- 225 Wọn délẹ,  
 Wọn ní Igún,  
 Ìwọ ló kù táwọn é e joyè o.



- 205 He cried aloud saying, "The long, dangling rope,  
Please, I beg you.  
The long, dangling rope, I beg you.  
I have just been installed a king.  
The long, dangling rope, I beg for mercy".
- 210 But the rope said that the cricket was given to him  
for safe keeping.  
He would therefore have no mercy.  
There and then he stretched his red cloth over  
himself,  
And died there.  
When they went to inspect him,
- 215 They said, "Don't you see now,  
We insisted on following him,  
But he told us to stay for him on the road.  
Now, **Ẹluùlú** has killed himself with greed".  
But others said, "He has overreached himself,
- 220 Let us go back home,  
And take **Igún**".  
But others reminded them that **Igún** was not  
healthy.  
While others expressed the hope that as soon as  
he mounted the throne,  
He would be a different person.
- 225 When they got home,  
They called on **Igún**.  
And told him that it was his turn to be made a  
king.

- Èluùlú fòkánjúà paraa rẹ.  
 Igún bá dide nílẹ̀,
- 230 Igún kọrí sóko aláwo.  
 Ọ lọ ọdọ àwọn Ìwohà-Ìwonpápá.  
 Ẹ yẹun lọọ kan ibò wò.  
 Wọn nÍgún, wọn lásọ araà rẹ lẹbọ.  
 Ó sì fi rúbọ.
- 235 Ó rórùúkọ,  
 Ó rọkẹẹ mẹfà.  
 Igún rúbọ tán nìi,  
 Nì wọn bá gbé 'Gún lọ eréko,  
 Wọn jáwé oyè lé e lérí,
- 240 Lẹnikán bá gbe.  
 Wọn bèrẹ sóríin dá fun bọ.  
 Wọn nÍsamú 'Gún jolórèé,  
 Ìwohà  
 A mú Gúnnugún jolórèé,
- 245 Ìwohà,  
 Ìwonpápáo  
 Ìwonnà.  
 Tí Gúnnugún e wọlé,  
 Kò pé kiní kan lòún rí.

- Because **Ẹluùlú** had killed himself with greed.  
 When **Igún** stood up,
- 230 He went to the home of the Ifá priests.  
 Known as **Ìwonnà- Ìwonpápá**.  
 He asked them to perform divination for him.  
 They told him that his covering cloth was needed  
 for sacrifice,  
 And he offered it for sacrifice.
- 235 He also performed sacrifice with a he-goat,  
 And six **òkẹ́** measures of cowries.  
 After **Igún** had performed sacrifice,  
 They took him to the farmland,  
 And placed the leaves of chieftaincy on his head.
- 240 One person carried him,  
 And they started singing in his praise.  
 They were saying, “We install **Igún** as **Olórée**,  
 Praise be to **Ìwohà**.  
 We install **Igún** as **Olórée**,
- 245 Praise be to **Ìwohà**.  
 Praise be to **Ìwonpápá**,  
 Praise be to **Ìwohà**.  
 Until **Gúnnugún** entered the town,  
 He did not say that he saw anything.

- 250 Ngbaa wọn délé,  
 Wọn yídó mēta sí gba-ngbaa 'ta.  
 Kò sága ngbaa 'wá sẹ.  
 Wọn yídó mēta sáàrin ìta,  
 Igún fìkan jókòó.
- 255 Èrìwò fìkan jókòó.  
 Ègbọn ẹ, òun ò sì ríran.  
 Ifá wí pé afójú kan m̀bẹ,  
 M̀bi wọn gbé dá Ifá un nì.  
 Kí wọn ọ lọ lèé tójú afójú un dáadáa.
- 260 Ifá wí pé yóò rína.  
 Ọ dá sẹ, ọ là sẹ,  
 Onbàtá, alaro,  
 Ni 'ọn bá bèrẹ̀ sí.  
 Ni 'ọn bèrẹ̀ sí.
- 265 Ni 'ọn bèrẹ̀ sóriin kọ.  
 Ni 'ọn bèrẹ̀ sóriin dá.  
 Wọn ṛsÈrìwò . . . . .  
 Ngba tí ọ yàá tí Gúnnugún jókòó tán,  
 Apá ẹwù tí ọ poun ọ sọ báíí,
- 270 Fà tọ na Èrìwò ẹgbọ̀n rẹ̀ lójú,  
 Èrìwò tí ò rína bí àtọ̀gọ̀rùún ọdún,  
 Èrìwò rína.

- 250 When they got home,  
 They placed three mortars inside the open  
 compound.  
 There were no chairs in ancient times.  
 They placed three mortars inside the open  
 compound.  
**Igún** sat on one mortar.
- 255 **Èrìwò** also sat on another mortar.  
**Èrìwò**, the brother of **Igún**, who was blind.  
 Ifá says there is one blind man  
 In the place where this Ifá is cast.  
 They should go and take care of him.
- 260 Ifá says that he would regain his sight.  
 After some time, at the appropriate moment,  
 All the drummers including the **bàtá**<sup>27</sup> and **aro**  
 drummers.  
 They started to perform.
- 265 They started to sing.  
 They started to bring forth new songs.  
 They were singing in praise of **Èrìwò**.  
 After **Gúnnugún** had sat down,  
 He flung the helm of his garment across his  
 shoulder,
- 270 And it struck **Èrìwò**, his brother, on the face,  
 And **Èrìwò** who had been blind for about a  
 hundred years,  
 Regained his sight.

Wọn níṣe, “Èriwo wá wòran o o,  
Èriwo wá wòran.

275 Gúnnugún lamú joyè Olórèé o o,  
Èriwò wá wòran o”.

They started to sing saying, “**Èrìwò**, come and see,  
**Èrìwò**, come and see.

275 **Gúnnugún** is the one we have installed as **Olórée**,  
**Èrìwò**, come and see”.

## NOTES

1. **Aláayè.** The title of the king of **Efòn Aláayè**, a town in **Ìjèsà** division.
2. **Agúnpopofóšómu.** A nickname which means, "He who pounds medicine with a loud noise for the wizard to drink".
3. A personal name which also means "human being".
4. **Àrùwé.** A strange personal name.
5. **Kál.** Sound made when driving away an animal.
6. These lines refer to a period when it was believed that twin babies were fairies and as such should be killed immediately they were born. This practise was found in many parts of Africa by Christian missionaries in the 19th century but it appears that it had been eradicated among the Yoruba prior to that time.
7. **Erí-ṣin-níi-kún-bí-igbó-bi-igbó.** Name of an Ifá priest meaning: "The hair of a horse is always overgrown like bush".
8. **Ọyọ.** The great metropolitan capital of the defunct **Ọyọ** Empire. The ruins of this ancient city now lie about a hundred miles north of present **Ọyọ** which was founded in the 1830's.
9. **Ọkẹ** A standard measure for cowries which contained 20,000 cowries, the rough equivalent of present-day Nigerian five shillings.
10. **Áákọṣin.** A personal name the meaning of which is obscure.
11. **Onídóòàgbọ̀n.** From **Oní-ídó-Àgbọ̀n** which means "Owner of **Ìdó-Àgbọ̀n**", the name of a small town.
12. **Olórée-Àgbọ̀n.** From **Oní-Òré-Àgbọ̀n** which means "Owner of **Òré-Àgbọ̀n** which is another place name.



13. "A place like **Aáwẹ**". This refers to the distance between a place in **Ọyọ** town called **Akeètàn** where this poem was collected and **Aáwẹ** which is a village about 2 miles to **Akeètàn**.
14. **Mòfòrìn**. Shortened form of **Akínmòfòrìn**, name of a village three miles from **Ọyọ**.
15. '**Lọfàrá**. Shortened form of **Ìlọfàrá**, name of another village about four miles from **Ọyọ**.
16. **Pánṣíkí-pánṣíkí-ni-wọ́fón-sínwó-erí-wọ̀jòwojò-là-á-sínkùn-ọlà**. Name of a party of Ifá priests meaning : "The cowries on **Orí** symbol are sown together very tightly but the **okùn** beads of a rich person are tied together very loosely. The symbol of **Orí** is a conical object made of leather to which cowry shells are sown in rows. Each person's **Orí** is regarded as his personal god.
17. **Ọòṣà-tó-múnú-ẹjò-gbópò-ló-fítan-ẹja-gbájeree-dẹ**. Name of a party of Ifá priests meaning "The **Ọrìṣà** who makes the intestines of a snake to be plentiful also makes the fish to stay inside the brazen colander".
18. **Gbòngbò-ọ̀nà-jẹ-kí-ẹlẹ̀sẹ-ó-rìn-gbogbo-ayé-gbogbo-kíí-ṣeé-lẹ̀ṣin**. Name of a party of Ifá priests meaning "The wooden stump on the highway, let a pedestrian walk in peace; it is not everyone on earth who can own a horse".
19. **Gúnnugún**. The vulture. "**Igún**", the shortened form of the word **Gúnnugún**, is the word most frequently used as a name for this bird. The vulture occupies an important position in Ifá divination sacrifice since it feeds mostly on the sacrifices made by Ifá priests and placed at cross-roads or on the shrine of **Ẹ̀ṣù**. A sacrifice which is not eaten up by the vulture, the dog

- or any other animal is believed to have been refused by the power or divinity for which it is meant.
- 20. **Ẹ̀rìwò**. Name of a large bird.
- 21. **Ẹ̀luùlù**. *Centropus Senegalensis*. The Senegal Coucal. Its feathers are red and it feeds mostly on insects.
- 22. **Tawo-lònà-tawo-ni-pápá**. Name of a party of Ifá priests meaning "The road belongs to the Ifá priest, the open field belongs to the Ifá priest".
- 23. **Alaro**. The singer who beats the aro, a round musical instrument made of iron. The singer strikes the instruments against themselves in an artistic manner to produce a peculiar, sonorous music. The aro is used as an accompaniment to **dùndún**, the talking drum. The aro artist is also an accomplished singer and historian.
- 24. **Dùndún**. The talking drum which contains a set of drums the components of which are the **gúdú-gúdú** (the small drum), the **omele**, and the **iyá ilù** (literally meaning the mother drum) which is the talking drum proper.
- 25. **Ẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀**. A musical instrument made of a gourd around which many cowry shells, sewn together on a cotton net, have been tied. The **ẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀** artist shakes, tumbles and throws the gourd up in the sky to produce his own peculiar music. **Ẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀** is also used as an accompaniment to the talking drum. Like the alaro, the **ẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀** artist is an accomplished singer.
- 26. **Ràrà**. A type of Yoruba poetic chant produced as salute to important people.
- 27. **Bàtá**. A drum set which produces a loud and hard music. **Bàtá** is the traditional drum of **Ẹ̀ṣàngó**, the god of thunder and lightning.

### iii. Thoughts About Women

The following is a good example of the long Ifá poems known as "Ifá Nlánílá", the language and style of which is beautiful while the content and themes are disjointed. Indeed, one can rightly claim that some poems of this class were originally several poems which were later merged into one. In this particular poem, the content is on the surface disjointed and the several points of the story seem unrelated; but a closer examination reveals that these seemingly unrelated pieces could be woven together into an important discussion about women.

The theme of women in this poem opens with a discussion of the virtues of monogamy and the problems involved in polygamy. It then moves on to tell the story of a marriage ceremony at a city known as Àró. After telling a story about the installation of a chief in the same city, the theme of women advances by an exposition of the experience of the narrator with "an old, worn out" woman who was probably a witch. Then, the narrator tells of an encounter with his own mother. The story advances from there to tell of an incident in the market of Ejìgbòmẹ̀kùn where death's mother was thoroughly beaten. This is followed by death's revenge of his mother's maltreatment. The final part of this long theme involving several thoughts about women, is the betrayal of death by his own wife leading to his defeat and injury.

It is interesting to find a Yoruba poem dealing with the virtues of monogamy because Yoruba traditional society is polygamous. However, this part of the poem is not a condemnation of polygamy but rather an analysis of the problems involved in it such as rivalry,

fighting, wickedness and witchcraft. Polygamy creates a favourable atmosphere for these marital problems which are not absent but minimal in a monogamous family situation. The most important point made here is that "one and only one is the number of wives that brings pleasure to any man".

From a discussion of monogamy, the discussion suddenly shifts to the narration of what happened at a marriage ceremony in the city of Àró. What is significant here is the prayer said on the occasion — asking that the bride be blessed with many children (both male and female) as well as with old age. To the Yoruba, a childless marriage is an unsuccessful one while living to a ripe old age makes the couple more fond of each other. The Yoruba value system is in fact, based on three things — *owó* (money), *ọmọ* (children), *àìkú* (long life). Long life is regarded as the most important of these good things because it provides the opportunity that could make possible the realisation of the other two things.

The next point in the story is the encounter of the narrator with an "old, worn-out woman" who invited him to eat of her food which consisted of marshed yams and coco-yams dressed with palm-oil. He did not accept the invitation but the old woman marked his cheeks with her oily hands. It is most probable that this old woman was a witch. This impression is strengthened by the woman's use of oil in marking his cheeks. Palm-oil is a commodity commonly used by the Yoruba in cooking their everyday meals. But it is also an important ritual article believed to be sacred to the witches. Among the Yoruba, women are the witches and very old women are feared because of the suspicion that they might be witches.

When the traveller in the story arrived home, he was challenged by his mother who accused him of eating outside. He denied this but the mark of oil on his cheeks did not convince the mother who threatened to beat him. But he protested that as an important Ifá priest, it was forbidden for anyone to beat him otherwise there would be chaos and confusion. In traditional Yoruba society, a man who had a mother or a wife would hardly eat outside the house except in a friend's or relation's house because eating outside indiscriminately would mean that he did not like his wife's or his mother's food or that he was quarrelling with them. In other words, rejection of one's mother's food or preference of food cooked outside to hers, could lead to the straining of relations within the family circle. A mother whose food is rejected by any member of the family would feel that her position is threatened and might react violently. We are therefore not surprised about the confrontation between mother and son caused by the suspicion that the son had eaten outside.

From strained relations between mother and son, the story moves to the attempt of a son to avenge the ill-treatment of his mother. This time, the son was Death himself whose mother was beaten up in the market-place. But in his indiscriminate attack on all things lying on his way, Death attempted to attack the *ayùnré* tree. The result was that Death was betrayed by his own wife who revealed to his enemies what he must not eat. Having tasted of the forbidden things, Death became powerless and when he attempted to wrestle with *ayùnré*, he slipped off and struck his chest against the bare ground.

The fight between *ayùnré* and Death is significant. *Ayùnré* is the tree sacred to *Ọyèkú Méjì*, the chapter to

which this poem of Ifá belongs. The theme of **Ọyèkú Méjì** is that of victory over one's enemies, freedom from death and illness. The victory of **ayùnré** over death is therefore symbolic of the victory of any man who believes in Ifá (and for whom this particular chapter has been 'cast') over the forces of the **ajogun** (Death, illness, disease etc.) who are believed to be the eternal enemies of man.

It is important also to note that Death was overpowered only after his enemies had succeeded in feeding him with what was forbidden for him to eat. The Yoruba believe that every person has what they call **èèwò**, something which is forbidden for one to eat. Some people must not eat some kind of vegetable, some kind of food or must not drink some kind of alcohol. When a man eats his **èèwò**, he becomes sick and he could die if sufficient care is not taken of him immediately. It is believed furthermore that one can only know one's **èèwò** by divination through the Ifá system.

It is also significant that the defeat of Death was caused by his own wife's betrayal of him, a universal theme in literature. So preponderant is this theme in Yoruba oral literature, that it is generally believed that the downfall of kings and other important people is almost invariably caused by their wives. The warning in lines 159-161

"Women are liars,  
Women are traitors;  
Let no man open his mind to women"

could be taken seriously by any Yoruba man. This unfortunate belief of Yoruba men about women is probably caused by the rivalries and suspicions endemic

**in man-woman relationship in a basically polygamous culture. It is probably to avoid this social strain that this poem recommends only one wife for every man.**

- Titiítí lórí ogbó.  
 Bìrìpé bìrìpé lomi ọkọọ dà.  
 Dídà lomi ọkọọ dà,  
 Omi ọkọ kii yí,
- 5 A díá fún Oòduà atẹwọnrọ.  
 Wọn ní bó rúbọ,  
 Lọdún yíí ní ó goróyèè baba ẹ;  
 Bí ò rúbọ,  
 Lọdún yíí ní á goróyèè baba ẹ.
- 10 Ẹábẹẹ lóró,  
 Tògún lọfà,  
 Wọn ọ jẹ ẹgun ilóbinrin,  
 Kí mbá wọn lọ.  
 Ḿbá mú pa,
- 15 Mà mú tà,  
 Ḿbá mú relé lọ ẹobinrin.  
 Ọràn bí ọyí bí ọyí.  
 A díá fún itú,  
 Ọkọ ewúré.
- 20 Ọràn bí ọyí bí ọyí.  
 A díá fún àgbò,  
 Ọkọ ilagùtàn.



The soul of elders is everlasting.<sup>1</sup>  
The water inside a moving canoe splashes about  
persistently.  
The water inside a canoe splashes about,  
It does not spill away.

- 5 Ifá divination was performed for **Oòduà**,<sup>2</sup> who  
descended from above upon iron chains.  
They said that if he performed sacrifice,  
It was in that year that he would ascend the throne  
of his fathers,  
And if he did not perform sacrifice,  
It was in that same year that he would ascend the  
throne of his fathers.

- 10 The people of **Şábèé**<sup>3</sup> have poison.  
The people of **Tògún**<sup>4</sup> have arrows.  
None of them dare lay a siege to the city of women.  
I would have gone with them.  
I would have killed many,

- 15 I would have sold many into slavery,  
And I would have taken some home as wives.  
Matters that seem always unstable.  
Ifá divination was performed for He-goat,  
The husband of goats.

- 20 Matters that seem always unstable.  
Ifá divination was performed for Ram,  
The husband of all sheep.

- Ọràn bí òyí bí òyí,  
 A díá fún àparòyẹyẹ,  
 25 Ọmọ olúoko.  
 Ọràn bí òyí bí òyí,  
 A díá fún akérépọnjú.  
 Ọmọ agẹmọ bá wọn lóhun gbogbo lóhun gbogbo.  
 Ọkan ọso ọró loblínrín dùn mọ lẹwọ ọkọ.  
 30 Bí wọn bá di méjì,  
 Wọn a dòjòwú.  
 Bí wọn bá di mẹta,  
 Wọn a dẹta òtúlẹ.  
 Bí wọn bá di mẹrin,  
 35 Wọn a di iwọ lo rín mi, ni mo rín ọ.  
 Bí wọn bá di márùún,  
 Wọn a di lágbájá  
 Ní ó run ọkọọ wa tán lóhun susuusu.  
 Bí wọn bá di mẹfà,  
 40 Wọn a dikà.  
 Bí wọn bá di méje,  
 Wọn a dàjẹ.  
 Bí wọn bá di mẹjo,  
 Wọn a di iyá alátàrí bàmbà

Matters that seem always unstable.  
Ifá divination was performed for featherless bush-  
fowl,

- 25 Offspring of the king of farmland.  
Matters that seem always unstable.  
Ifá divination was performed for **akérépónjús**,  
The son of chameleon who always shares out of  
everything.<sup>6</sup>  
It is one and only wife that brings pleasure to  
any man.
- 30 When there are two wives,  
They become rivals.  
When they increase to three,  
They destroy the home.  
When they increase to four,
- 35 They laugh one another to scorn.  
When they increase to five,  
They will accuse someone among them  
Of monopolising their husband's property.  
When they increase to six,
- 40 They become wicked people.  
When they increase to seven,  
They become witches.  
When they increase to eight,  
They will say that the fat-headed favourite.

- 45 Ló ti kó irú èyí sẹ ọkọọ wa lówó.  
 Bí wọn bá di mèsàán,  
 Wọn a di ìyáálée wa ò níşẹ kan,  
 Kọ lábọ kan,  
 Bọ bá ti jí,
- 50 Aşọ ọkọọ wa níí mááá sán kiri.  
 Bí wọn bá di mệwàá,  
 Wọn a di ilé lẹkọọ wá jókòó,  
 Ní wọn nńwá ọkọọ waá wá.  
 Ìgbà tó di lẹẹkíní,
- 55 Mo lọ bá wọn jáńpata lóde Àró.  
 Wọn nńké jáńpata jáńpataá mọ mi.  
 Wọn nńké oloye oloyéé mọ mi.  
 Mo ní kín lẹ nşẹ lóde Àró ?  
 Wọn ní ìyàwó làwọn nńgbé.
- 60 Mo ní ẹ pẹlẹ o.  
 Ìyàwó àgbélé,  
 Ọmọ àbílù,  
 Ọmọ agbóge lóri oge.  
 Ìyàwó ọ bọşsàn,
- 65 Ìyàwó ó bọóòro.  
 Ìyàwó ó gbòógbó Olúyẹyéntuyẹ,

- 45 Has taught their husband his evil ways.  
 When they increase to nine,  
 They will say that the favourite wife has no other  
     work,  
 No other occupation,  
 Except to wake up in the morning,
- 50 And wrap herself with their husband's cloth.  
 When they increase to ten,  
 They will say that even when their husband stays  
     at home  
 Women come in to visit him.  
 On the first occasion,
- 55 I went to engage in a contest in the city of Àró.<sup>7</sup>  
 The people of Àró were shouting at me.  
 They were yelling at me.  
 I asked, "What are you doing in the city of Àró?"  
 They told me that they were marrying a wife.
- 60 Then, I said, "Accept my greetings.  
 You will marry more wives.  
 You will bear many more children.  
 You will marry more and more maidens.  
 The wife will deliver female children.
- 65 She will deliver male children.  
 The wife will live to become old like Olúyẹ́yẹ́n -  
 tuyẹ.<sup>8</sup>

- Ìyàwó ó gbòógbó Olúyèyèntuyè,  
 Ìyàwó ó gbòógbó Olúògbó;  
 Èyí tó gbó gbóó gbó,
- 70 Tọ fọmọówú rán óndè sọrùn.  
 Ọmọówú jẹ jẹ kù bí abéré,  
 Abéré jẹ jẹ kù bí ìrù ẹsin.  
 Mo ní ẹ jẹ nkọjá.  
 Wọn ní n máa lọ.
- 75 Mo dé igbó je,  
 Èlùjù je.  
 Mo bá iyá arúgbó kan jòkújòkú.  
 Ó pèwó ịsukọ sọwọ ọtún,  
 Ọ pa tewùrà sọwọ òsì,
- 80 Ó pèwóó kókò sààrin.  
 Ó ní n wáá jẹ,  
 Mo lémi ọ gbọdọ jẹ ẹ.  
 Nígba èẹkejì,  
 Mo lọ bá wọn jánpata lóde Àró.
- 85 Wọn níké jánpata jánpataá mọ mi.  
 Wọn níké oloye oloyeé mọ mi.  
 Mo ní kín lẹ nse lóde Àró?  
 Wọn ní àwọn níjoyè ni.  
 Mo ní ẹ pẹlẹ o.

The wife will be as old as **Olúyẹ̀yẹ̀ntuyẹ̀**.  
She will be as old as **Olùògbó**,  
Who was so old

- 70 That he used an anvil to make a belt of charm  
round the neck.  
The anvil became old and worn-out that its size  
was reduced to that of a needle.  
The needle-sized iron became old and worn-out that  
it was reduced to the size of a horse's tail hair".  
Then, I pleaded, "Let me pass".  
They said I could continue on my journey.
- 75 On my way, I passed through seven forests,  
Seven wildernesses.  
I met one old worn-out woman.  
She put boiled and crushed yam on the right.  
She placed boiled and crushed wateryam on her  
left.
- 80 She placed boiled and crushed cocoyam in the  
middle.  
She invited me to eat,  
But I declined.  
On the second occasion,  
I went to engage in a contest with them in the city  
of **Àró**.
- 85 The people of **Àró** were shouting at me.  
They were yelling at me.  
I asked, "What are you doing in the city of **Àró**?"  
They answered that they were installing a chief.  
I said, "Accept my greetings.

- 90 Oyè ó gbòógbó Olúyeyètuyé,  
 Oyè ó gbòógbó Olúyèyèntuyé,  
 Oyè ó gbòógbó Olúògbó;  
 Èyí tó gbó gbóó gbó,  
 Tọ ọmọwú rán ọùdè sọrùn.
- 95 Ọmọwú jẹ jẹ kù bí abéré,  
 Abéré jẹ jẹ kù bí ìrù esin.  
 Mo ní ẹ jẹ nkọjá.  
 Wọn ní n máa lọ.  
 Mo dé igbó je,
- 100 Èlùjù je.  
 Mo bá ìyá arúgbó kan jọkújọkú.  
 Ó pèwó ịsukọ sọwọ ọtún,  
 Ó pa tewùrà sọwọ òsì,  
 Ó pèwóó kókò sààrin.
- 105 Ó ní n wáá jẹ,  
 Mo lémi ọ gbọdọ jẹ ẹ.  
 Ó mú ọwọ epo,  
 Ó fi tọ mi lẹ̀ẹ̀kẹ̀ẹ̀ mi ọtún itọrọrọ, itọrọrọ.  
 Ó mú ọwọ epo,
- 110 Ó fi tọ mi lẹ̀ẹ̀kẹ̀ẹ̀ mi òsì itọrọrọ, itọrọrọ.  
 Ìgbà tí mo délé,  
 Ìyá ní mo jẹun lóde.



- 90 The chief will be as old as **Olúyẹ́yẹ́ntuyẹ́**.  
 He will be as old as **Olúyẹ̀yẹ̀ntuyẹ̀**.  
 The chief will be as old as **Olúògbó**,  
 Who was so old  
 That he used an anvil to make a belt of charms  
 round the neck.
- 95 The anvil became old and so worn-out that it's  
 size was reduced to that of a needle.  
 The needle-sized iron became old and so worn-out  
 that it was reduced to the size of a horse's  
 tail hair."  
 Then, I pleaded, "Let me pass".  
 They said I could continue on my journey.  
 I passed through seven forests,
- 100 Seven wildernesses.  
 I met one old, worn-out woman.  
 She put boiled and crushed yam in palmoil on her  
 right.  
 She placed boiled and crushed wateryam on her  
 left.  
 She placed boiled and crushed cocoyam in the  
 middle.
- 105 She invited me to eat.  
 But I declined.  
 She took her oily hand,  
 And with it made a slender mark on my right  
 cheek.  
 She took her oily hand,
- 110 And with it made a slender mark on my left cheek.  
 When I arrived at home,  
 Mother said that I ate outside.

Mo lémi ọ ẹjun lóde.  
Ìyá lóun ọ nà mí.

115 Mo ní èèwọ Ọòṣà.

Ẹnikan ọ gbọdọ na babaláwo,  
Tọ bá gbọfá yanran yanran lótù Ifẹ yí.  
Wọn ní emi níí ẹ?  
Mo ní béèyán bá na babaláwo,

120 Tọ gbọfá yanran yanran lótù Ifẹ yí,  
Ohun burúkú a máa já lohun burúkú,  
Ohun búrùkù a sì já lohun búrùkù;  
Ẹgún ẹwọn ó ẹbú lẹgún àta,  
Ohun burúkú a máa já luraa wọn.

125 Pamínpaọ ni páńsá ojúbunáá ré luraa wọn.  
Lùmínlùọ ni kèngbè méjìì luraa wọn lònà odò.  
Lónlì ni párikòkò ọ tẹnuu dùndún wá,  
Lónlì ni párigìdì ọ tẹnu bàtá jáde.  
A díá fún Ọrúnmìlà

130 Níjọ tí wọn nípàyá ikú nígbè  
Lọjà Ejìgbòmẹkùn.  
Ikú gbọ,  
Ikú han bíi gáte.  
Ikú mérin ẹ kẹsé,

But I said I did not.

Mother said that she would beat me.

115 To which I answered, "It is forbidden by the gods  
For anyone to beat an Ifá priest

Who knows Ifá very well in this city of Ifẹ".

But she asked what would be the consequence if  
she did so.

To which I replied, "If a person beats an Ifá priest

120 Who knows Ifá very well in this city of Ifẹ,

Bad things will fall from above upon bad things;

Worse things will fall upon worse things.

Sharp ẹwọn thorns<sup>10</sup> will fall upon sharp àta<sup>11</sup>  
thorns.

Bad things will fall upon one another.

125 The gourd hung over the fireplace falls upon those  
beneath sounding pamínpaó.<sup>12</sup>

Gourds hit one another on the way to the river  
sounding lùmínlùó.<sup>13</sup>

This is the day the dùndún drum<sup>14</sup> will sound no  
more.

This is the very day that bàtá drum<sup>15</sup> will not  
sound again".

Ifá divination was performed for Ọrúnmilà

130 On the day Death's mother was being flogged

In the market of Èjìgbòmekùn.<sup>16</sup>

Death heard,

And cried aloud in anger.

Death made the elephant his horse's spur.

- 135 Ó fẹfọn ẹokùn fà,  
 Ọ fàkekèè pa kẹsẹ ijà mèsẹ danindàndanin.  
 Ikú té orí ooro,  
 Ooro gbìrànmù nílẹ.  
 Ikú té orí apá,
- 140 Apá gbìrànmù nílẹ.  
 Ikú té orí ìgbá,  
 Ìgbá gbìrànmù nílẹ.  
 Ikú té orí igi gbogbo,  
 Igi gbogbo gbìrànmù nílẹ.
- 145 Ayùnrẹ nìkàn ló ní orí òun ò gbó.  
 Ó ní ikú tí ñpọlọjà tí ñpaládé,  
 Ikú tí ñpa lóókọlóókọ,  
 Ikú tí ñponílẹ tí ñpàbùlẹdó;  
 Báwo ni ikú yíi ò ẹ ní pòun ?
- 150 Ayùnrẹ mú eéjì adibò,  
 Ó mú ẹẹta itení,  
 Ọ kọrí sóko aláwo,  
 Wọn ní ó réku méjì olùwéré,  
 Wọn ní ọ réja méjì abiwẹgbàdà.
- 155 Obídiẹ méjì abẹdọ lùkẹlùkẹ,  
 Ewúré méjì abàmú rẹdẹrẹdẹ,  
 Ẹnlá méjì tó fìwo ẹsùkà.

- 135 He made the buffalo his rope.  
 He made the scorpion his tightly fixed spur, ready  
 for war.  
 Death was next seen on top of the **ooro** tree.<sup>17</sup>  
 He pulled down the **ooro** tree with a great force.  
 Death was next seen on top of the mahogany tree.
- 140 He pulled down the mahogany tree with a great  
 force.  
 Death was next seen on top of the locust-bean tree.  
 He pulled down the locust bean tree with a great  
 force.  
 Death was on top of other trees.  
 He fell down other trees with great force.
- 145 The only exception was the **ayùnré**<sup>18</sup> tree who said  
 that he was not ripe for the fight.  
 He asked, "Death who kills popular men and kings.  
 Death who kills great names,  
 Death who kills free-born citizens and strangers,  
 How will this death not kill him?"
- 150 **Ayùnré** got hold of two cowries for casting Ifá lots,<sup>19</sup>  
 He took the three cowries to be paid before the  
 Ifá priest spreads his mat<sup>20</sup>,  
 He went to the house of an Ifá priest.  
 He was asked to perform sacrifice with two fast-  
 moving rats,  
 Two fish that swim gracefully,
- 155 Two hens with big livers,  
 Two goats heavy with foetus.  
 Two cows with fat horns.

Gbogbo rẹ nàà ló rú.  
Obìnrin 1èké,

- 160 Obìnrin 1òdàlẹ̀,  
Kéèyàà n mọ́ finú hàn fóbìnrin.  
A díá fún Olójòhògbòdú,  
Obìnrin Ikú  
Wọn pè é lóòórò kùtùkùtù,
- 165 Wọn ní kìn nì Ikú ọkọ ọ̀rẹ ọ gbọdọ jẹ.  
Tó fi ńpọmọ ọlọmọọ kiri ?  
Ó ní kìn nì wọn ó fùún òun ?  
Ó ní òun ọ gba igba ọkẹ lẹwọọ wọn.  
Ìgbà tọ gba igba ọkẹ tán,
- 170 Ó ní Ikú, ọkọ òun, ọ gbọdọ jeku.  
Wọn ní bọ bá jeku ńkọ ?  
Ó ní ọwọ Ikú a máa wá iróróró iróróró.  
Ó ní Ikú, ọkọ òun, ọ gbọdọ jeja.  
Wọn ní bọ bá jeja ńkọ ?
- 175 Ó ní ẹsẹ Ikú a máa gbọ̀n irìrìrì irìrìrì.  
Ó ní Ikú, ọkọ òun, ọ gbọdọ jẹyin pépéyẹ.  
Wọn ní bọ bá jẹyin pépéyẹ ńkọ ?  
Ó ní Ikú a máa bì igòròrọ igòròrọ.  
Ó ní Ikú, ọkọ òun, ọ gbọdọ jelébutẹ.
- 180 Wọn ní bọ bá jelébutẹ ńkọ ?  
Ó ní gbogbo ara Ikú a máa hù ibùtẹ ibùtẹ.

He performed everything.

Women are liars,

160 Women are traitors.

Let no man open his mind to women.

Ifá divination was performed for **Olójàngbòdú**,<sup>21</sup>

The wife of Death.

She was called early in the morning,

165 And asked what her husband must not eat

That made him able to kill other people's children  
about.

She asked for what they would give her.

She said that she would take two hundred **òkẹ́**<sup>22</sup>  
measures of cowries

After she had taken the money,

170 She said Death, her husband, must not eat rats.

They asked, "What would happen if he ate rats" ?

She said, "The hands of Death would shake with-  
out stop".

She said, Death, her husband must not eat fish.

They asked, "What would happen if he ate fish?"

175 She said, "The feet of Death would shake with-  
out stop".

She said that Death, her husband, must not eat  
duck's egg.

They asked, "What would happen if he ate duck's  
egg ?"

She said, "Death would vomit without stop."

She said that Death, her husband, must not eat  
**elébútẹ́**

180 They asked, "What would happen if he ate  
**elébútẹ́** ?"

She said, "Death would become very weak."

Wọn fúnkú léku,  
Ó jeku tán,  
Gbogbo ọwọ́ Ikú níwá iróróró iróróró.

185 Wọn fúnkú léja,  
Ó jeja tán,  
Gbogbo ẹsẹ́ Ikú nǵbọ̀n iririri iririri.  
Wọn fúnkú lẹ̀yiin pẹ̀pẹ̀yẹ,  
Ó jẹ̀yiin pẹ̀pẹ̀yẹ tán,

190 Ikú m̀bì igòròrò igòròrò.  
Wọn fúnkú lélébutẹ,  
Ó jelébutẹ tán,  
Gbogbo ara Ikú ǹhù ibùtẹ ibùtẹ.  
Ikú té orí ayùnrẹ,

195 Ayùnrẹ yẹrí bèsé.  
Ikú wáá yò tẹ̀ẹ̀rẹ,  
Ó wáá figẹ́ sálẹ.  
Ikú wáá yò tẹ̀ẹ̀rẹ,  
Ó wáá di gbìrà̀mù ǹlẹ,

200 Ó wáá fariwo ta sáále sáále.  
Ọ̀rúnmlá ló dọ̀yẹ̀yẹ mi ọ̀yẹ̀yẹ.  
Ọ̀ótọ́ níkú yẹ lórí awo,  
Ọ̀yẹ̀yẹ.  
Mo jáwé olúyẹ̀ẹ̀rẹ́ o.

205 Ọ̀yẹ̀yẹ.



- They gave rats to Death.  
 Death ate rats,  
 And his hands started to shake without stop.
- 185 They gave fish to Death.  
 Death ate fish,  
 And his feet started to shake without stop.  
 They gave duck's egg to Death.  
 Death ate duck's egg,
- 190 And he started to vomit without stop.  
 They gave **elébuté** to Death.  
 Death ate **elébuté**,  
 And he became very weak.  
 Death climbed up the **ayùnré** tree.
- 195 The **Ayùnré** tree moved to one side.  
 Death slipped suddenly,  
 And fell, chest downward.  
 Death slipped suddenly,  
 And fell down with a loud noise,
- 200 And started to shout for pain.  
**Òrúnmilà** said, "**Òyèyè**,<sup>24</sup> I hail you.  
 It is certainly true that Death has slipped from  
 Ifá priest's head.  
**Òyèyè**, I salute you.  
 I pluck the leaves of **Olúyèrè** tree."<sup>25</sup>
- 205 **Òyèyè**, I salute you."

## NOTES

1. The soul of elders is everlasting. The Yoruba believe in life after death for people who have attained old age before their deaths. When an old man dies, he is believed only to have made a change of position from one plane of existence here on earth to another plane in heaven.
2. **Oòduà**. The great mythical ancestor of the Yoruba. He is believed to have descended from the sky into **Ifè**, the cradle of Yoruba civilization.
3. **Šáběẹ**. Name of a dialect group of the Yoruba-speaking people of Dahomey.
4. **Tògún**. Name of another place.
5. **Akérépónjú**. Name of an animal.
6. Chamelion who always shares out of everything. This refers to the power of the chameleon in taking on any colour within its immediate environment.
7. The city of **Àró**. This is a place-name referring to a place the chief of which bears the title **Àró**, an important **Ògbóni** title.
8. **Olúyẹ́yéntuyẹ**. Name of a mythical being who is believed to have lived for hundreds of years.
9. **Olúògbó**. Name of another person believed to have lived very long on earth.
10. **Èwòn** thorns. The thorns of a shrub which grows in curves resembling a chain.
11. **Àta** thorns. The thorns of a shrub also known by that name.
12. **Pamínpaó**. This literally means "kill me and I also kill you." It is an imitation of the sound made by two small gourds falling on each other.

13. **Lùmínlùfó**. This can be translated literally as “beat me and I also beat you”. It is an imitation of the sound made by two big gourds falling on each other.
14. **Dùndún** drum. The Yoruba talking drum. It consists of a set of four drums beaten by a group of artists. The drum is called “talking drum” because it is capable of making use of codes to produce a type of language which nearly all Yoruba people can decode.
15. **Bátá** drum. This is another set of talking drums used in the worship of **Ṣàngó**, the Yoruba thunder and lightning Divinity.
16. **Èjìgbòmẹ̀kùn**. A famous market in Yoruba oral literature believed to be the most important market of old **Ọ̀yọ́**, which is now in ruins.
17. **Ooro** tree. A very tall hard-wood which resembles the African teak.
18. **Ayùnrẹ́**. Albizzia of any species (Mimosaceae). A tall hard-wood often mentioned in Ifá literary corpus. It is believed to be sacred to **Ọ̀yẹ̀kú Méjì**, the second **Odù** of Ifá
19. Casting of Ifá lots. These lots known as **ìbò** consist of a pair of cowries tied together symbolising “yes” and a piece of bone which stands for “no”.
20. These are the three cowries which a client must put on the Ifá instrument before the Ifá priest spreads his mat and starts divination. It is however not a “consultation fee” because the Ifá priest could carry on the divination without the three cowries.
21. **Olójò̀ngbòdú**. This literally means the owner of **Ọ̀jò̀ngbòdú**, a quarter in **Ọ̀yọ́**.

22. **Ọkẹ́.** A straw container of cowries which holds twenty thousand cowries, the equivalent of the modern Nigerian five shillings.
23. **Elébutẹ́.** A type of vegetable food crop.
24. **Ọyẹyẹ.** Another name for **Ọyẹkú Méjì**, the second of the major sixteen **Odù** of **Ifá**.
25. **Olúyẹẹrẹ** tree. Another name for **ayùnrẹ**. (see footnote 18 above).

*iv.*    **Ifá, Threatened By Death, Was Saved  
By The Giant Rat and Iyewa**

This poem portrays conflict between **Ọrúnmìlà**, a representative of the divine forces, and Death, one of the main antagonists of man collectively known as **ajogun** (literally “warriors against man”). The **ajogun** and the **àjé** (witches) are believed to be the avowed enemies of man who have no other business in life apart from the ruination of man’s handiwork. Some of the other **ajogun** are **àrùn** (Disease), **òfò** (Loss), **ẹgbà** (Paralysis) and **ọràń** (Trouble).

**Ọrúnmìlà** saw in his sleep that danger was threatening. He therefore consulted his divination instruments and he was asked to perform sacrifice with a giant rat. That giant rat which he used for sacrifice made a hole from the back of his house into his sitting room. So that when Death eventually came one morning, looking for **Ọrúnmìlà**, the latter slipped into the giant rat’s hole and emerged outside the house.

When **Ọrúnmìlà** escaped from his house, he started to run away from Death while the latter was also tracing his footsteps along the road. At last, **Ọrúnmìlà** arrived at a river where he met **Iyewa**, an important but single lady, washing clothes. When he disclosed to her that he was being pursued by Death, **Iyewa** covered him up with the wooden receptacle inside which she was washing her clothes. When Death at last came to the river, **Iyewa** deceived him when she said that **Ọrúnmìlà** had gone very far away from the river whereas the latter was beneath the wooden bowl upon which she was sitting.

When **Iyewa** noticed that Death had gone very far, she opened the wooden bowl and asked, **Ọrúnmìlà** to follow her home. In the home of **Iyewa**, **Ọrúnmìlà**

was well entertained with all the things he liked to eat. At night, **Ọrúnmílà** made love to **Iyewa**. The result was that she became pregnant and both of them later married each other despite the fact that socially **Iyewa** was a more important person than **Ọrúnmílà**.

In this seemingly simple story, we see a number of important points. First, the state of war existing between Death and **Ọrúnmílà**. We are not told why Death wanted to kill **Ọrúnmílà** simply because we do not need to be told. Death and the other **ajogun** are believed to be in a constant and permanent state of war with man and the good or friendly supernatural powers i.e. the **òrìṣà** and the ancestors. Therefore there does not have to be any offence at all before one of the **ajogun** attacks any man or any of the **òrìṣà**.

Secondly, we notice that the giant rat was the first saviour of **Ọrúnmílà**. The relationship between the giant rat and **Ọrúnmílà** as portrayed by the Ifá literary corpus is a very interesting one. He is usually presented as the avowed friend of **Ọrúnmílà** who later betrayed him. Hence the Ifá song :

“Òkété, báyii nìwà ré.

Ọ báfá mulẹ,

Ọ dafá”.

Giant-rat, so this is your character.

You drank earth with Ifá (i.e. vowed never to betray Ifá),

But (at last) you betrayed him”.

One of the reasons why the giant-rat is regarded as a friend of Ifá is that this animal loves to store many palmnuts inside its hole. The question of betrayal comes in because the giant-rat does not store palmnuts for fun. It stores them for food during wet days or

at any other time when it finds it difficult to go out.

Thirdly, we see in this story, **Iyewa**, a woman as saviour of **Ọrúnmìlà**. The story indeed ends with both of them in a happy, married life singing in praise of each other. This is in great contrast to the poem contained in the last chapter where we see Death's wife as the cause of her husband's downfall. We therefore see in the total picture of women in Yoruba literature, a love-hate situation. On the one hand women are the witches; they are branded as liars and men are warned not to open all their hearts to them. But on the other hand, they perform the mysterious function of carrying the foetus in their wombs and bringing them forth as children. They can also bestow love and satisfaction to man's life. In other words, women are presented on the one hand as evil and on the other hand as good. Even the **àjé** (witches) are sometimes said to be good ! One sometimes hears of benevolent **àjé**.

Lastly, in this story, **Iyewa** married **Ọrúnmìlà** because she discovered that as a result of the sexual contact they had, she became pregnant. At this stage, there was no sign of love between them. But **Iyewa** decided to marry **Ọrúnmìlà** for this reason alone, and she remained ever grateful to him saying, "He prevented me from childlessness." This poem therefore underlines the well-known question of the importance of children in African marital life. As already mentioned, children, for the Yoruba, constitute an important aspect of their value system. A childless life is regarded as a loss, a waste and a disappointment. Thus we see the importance placed on fertility and continuity represented by children as an important aspect of the whole purpose of life itself.

Ó ní 'Janrígí lawo Ìjanrígí.  
Ìjanrìgí lawo Ìjanrìgí.  
Ìjanrìgí jagada.  
Dífá fỌrùnmilà,

- 5 Ifá dá 'Dingbè, wọn ní ikú dé.  
Ọrùnmilà ló gbókè Ìpọ̀rí ẹ kalẹ.  
“Ibi ò le kàun mọ” ?  
Sálápẹẹrẹ loun náà.  
Ó sùn, oorun rẹ ọ dọgba.
- 10 Ifá wí pé àbéléyiun suunrun kan mọjú ?  
Kó kiè sí i o.  
Ikú nńwá a á kii wàrà wàrà báyií nńsílín ,  
Tọ fẹẹ pa á.  
Apata òkété ní kó fi rúbọ sọdọ Èsù.
- 15 Owó pípọ náà bẹẹ.  
Ọ dá ẹ, ọ là ẹ,  
Wọn ní Ọrùnmilà,  
Wọn lẹbọ ní ó rú o.  
KỌrùnmilà ó jí nkùtùkùtù àárọ ,
- 20 Kó poun ọ bọ́ta bọ́jú,  
Ló wo ẹnu ọnà òde,  
Ní ikú fi aṣọ osùn rẹ bora,



He said that Janrígí¹, the Ifá priest of Ìjanrígí;  
Ìjanrígí, the Ifá priest of Ìjanrígí¹;  
Ìjanrígí whose other name was Jagada,  
Performed divination for Òrúnmílà

- 5 When he cast Ìdingbè² and he was warned about  
imminent death.

It was Òrúnmílà who laid down his Òké-ìpòrí³,  
And asked whether he was free from all evils.

Òrúnmílà was a suspecting person.

When he slept, he discovered that his sleep was  
not sound.

- 10 Ifá says that probably this person had a bad sleep  
the previous night.

He should watch out,

Because death is right now anxiously looking for  
him,

In order to kill him.

He should offer a big giant rat as sacrifice to Èṣù

- 15 Together with plenty of money.

After some time in the process of divination,

Òrúnmílà was warned

That he must perform sacrifice.

When Òrúnmílà woke up very early in the morning,

- 20 And as he stepped out of his house in order to  
wash his face,

He looked up towards the main entrance to the  
compound⁴,

And saw death clad in his red clothes,

- Ló fi gbóngbó kọrùn,  
Ní nkúú bọ fià.
- 25 Juu tó lu ọ̀dẹ̀,  
Apata ọ̀kété tỌ̀rúnmilá sì e rúbọ,  
Ó kọlu yàrá.  
Ó tún jáde nýàrá,  
Ó tún bọ̀nńúu pálọ.
- 30 Hùn, lọ bá terí bọ . . . . .  
Apata ọ̀kété sì ti gbẹ̀sà,  
Látí ídí Èsù tó ti ẹ̀ àrúbọ sí.  
Ó sì wáá lujú ẹ̀ sọ̀dẹ̀ Ọ̀rúnmilà.  
Ju tỌ̀rúnmilà lunńú 'hò ọ̀kété,
- 35 Èyìnkùlé ẹ̀ lọ yọ sí.  
Ngbàa kú ọ̀ wọ̀dẹ̀,  
Ó wolẹ̀, ó wòkẹ̀.  
Ó wo yàrá, ọ̀ wọ̀dẹ̀,  
Ó gàjà,
- 40 Kò rí Ọ̀rúnmilà mọ.  
Ní ẹnì tóun rí lẹnu ọ̀nàa rẹ̀ nń̀sílín,  
Èé ha ti á jẹ́?  
Ọ̀rúnmilà ti tàtapò,  
Ó ti họ.
- 45 Ó ti gbé àpò àgbìràa rẹ̀ àtìrùkẹ̀.

With his heavy club on his neck,  
Coming along in great haste.

- 25 **Ọrúnmìlà** ran into the house.  
And the giant rat which **Ọrúnmìlà** offered for  
sacrifice had . . .  
**Ọrúnmìlà** ran into the bedroom,  
And ran out again from the bedroom,  
And went inside the parlour.
- 30 He then ran inside the. . . . .  
The giant rat had made a big hole  
From the shrine of **Èṣù** where the sacrifice was  
placed into **Ọrúnmìlà**'s sitting room.  
When **Ọrúnmìlà** went inside the hole of the giant  
rat,
- 35 He came out of it at the back of his house.  
When death entered the house,  
He looked down and up.  
He searched the bed-room and the sitting room.  
He climbed the ceiling.
- 40 But he could not find **Ọrúnmìlà**  
He wondered what could have happened to the  
man he saw by the door just a few moments  
before.  
He questioned himself as to what had happened.  
But **Ọrúnmìlà** had crossed to safety.  
He had escaped.
- 45 He carried with him his **àgbirà** bags and his fly  
wisk.

Jùà, jùà, jùà, jùà, jùà, jùà,  
 Ngbà tí Ikú ó fí sáńgì ilé Ọ́rúnmìlà tán,  
 Pé hàà ! kò sá le jòòdẹẹ rẹ yí nàà lọ,  
 Ìrin Ọ́rúnmìlà ó tí fẹẹẹ dẹrú Ìbàdàn.

- 50 Ikú, ńgbòó tú ọ̀òdẹẹ rẹ tán, tí ọ̀ rí,  
 Ọ̀ bọ sẹyìnkùlẹ ẹ.  
 Ló rójú ẹsẹẹ rẹ ńlẹ.  
 Àtá bà yiun nàà.  
 Ikú fọn ọn.
- 55 Rie, rie, rie, rie,  
 Ọ́rúnmìlà nàà ọ̀ dúó.  
 KỌ́rúnmìlà ó dódò,  
 Sàlà, sàlà, sàlà,  
 Ẹ́jẹ kó gòkẹ odò,
- 60 Ó sì bá 'Yewa lójú odò.  
 Ló DOJÚU 'gbá délẹ ní ńfọ́sọ.  
 Ọ́rúnmìlà ọ̀ le kí i.  
 Há hà ! ó ní Baba kére-fọgbọ́n-senú,  
 Èé tí jẹ?
- 65 Kín ní ńlẹ ọ̀ tórú èyí ?  
 E èé sárée.  
 Háà ! Ó ní nńkán ju nńkan lọ lóníí.  
 Ó níkú ńlẹ un ún bọ lẹyìn.

He ran away in great haste.  
Before death finished searching Òrúnmìlà's house  
Wondering whether he was somewhere in the  
house,  
Òrúnmìlà had travelled a distance as far as  
Ìbàdàn.<sup>6</sup>

- 50 When death searched the house without seeing  
Òrúnmìlà,  
He went to the back of the house,  
And saw Òrúnmìlà's foot-prints on the ground.  
He said that was a very good trail.  
Death moved away,
- 55 Running in great haste.  
Òrúnmìlà himself did not stop running.  
When Òrúnmìlà got to a river,  
He waded through it in great haste.  
But as he was about to cross the river bank,
- 60 He found 'Yewa' near the river.  
She turned her wooden tray upside down and was  
washing her clothes on it.  
Òrúnmìlà could not greet her.  
But she said in amazement, "Father, the small one  
with a mind full of wisdom,<sup>8</sup>  
What is the matter ?
- 65 What is chasing you like this ?  
I know that you do not usually run like this."  
Òrúnmìlà replied that he was really in a desperate  
situation,  
Because death was the one chasing him.

- Hà hà hà! Ó ní dúó, dúó, dúó,
- 70 Ó ní mọ lọ mọ.  
 Ó ní mọọ bọ.  
 Igbá ọpọn rẹ hẹhẹ tí fí ńfọsọ,  
 Ó sì da aṣọ kúò ńnú ẹ.  
 Ó ní gọ mọlẹ.
- 75 Lọ bá gọ mọlẹ.  
 Ọ fọpọn de.  
 Lọ bá jókòó lórí ọpọn.  
 NÍyewá bá ńfọsọ.  
 Kọ dá ẹ, ọ là ẹ,
- 80 NÍkú dé fià, fià, fià.  
 Leesín ńkùn ún ràìn.  
 Gbogbo ara ńrin sììn.  
 Ó kÍyewa.  
 Iyewá kí i.
- 85 Ó ní ọnàa bo lo bóun rỌrùúnmilà sí ?  
 Ó ní háà! bíwọ náà ọ bàá pànìyàn,  
 Ọ ọ mọọọ fi pé ọ bàà lágbára lọọ mọọọ fíí sàwẹwa.  
 Ó ní òjỌrùúnmilà kó ò ńlé ?  
 Ó ní hain.
- 90 Hààà! ó ní gbọ,  
 Ká pé ńwọọwọ,

- She asked **Ọrúnmílà** to wait,
- 70 And stop running.  
 She asked him to come along.  
 She took her big wooden tray on which she was  
 washing,  
 And poured out her clothes from it.  
 She asked **Ọrúnmílà** to lie down.
- 75 **Ọrúnmílà** lied down,  
 She covered him up with the wooden tray,  
 And sat upon it.  
**Iyewa** then continued her washing.  
 After a while, and at last,
- 80 Death came in great haste  
 With flies flocking around him,  
 And with his body dripping all over (with blood).  
 He greeted **Iyewa**,  
 And **Iyewa** also greeted him.
- 85 Death asked from her the direction in which  
**Ọrúnmílà** went.  
 But she replied saying, "When you want to kill  
 people,  
 You always rely on your power and take things  
 rather carelessly".  
 She asked whether it was not **Ọrúnmílà** whom  
 death was pursuing.  
 Death replied, "Yes".
- 90 She laughed and said, "Listen carefully  
 Even if he is crawling along,

- 115 Àşedànù ní nşe é.  
 Oko dà ?  
 Ó fi Ọrúnmilá sí yàrá kan.  
 Iyewá kóó yàrá kan,  
 Ó sùn.
- 120 Ngbòòkàn Ọrúnmilá balẹ tán,  
 Tó jiyán, nnú ẹ ẹ nà tọtò.  
 Tó jeku, tọ jẹrú,  
 Tára ẹ ẹ yá,  
 Ó ti gbàgbé ajogun tó le e dọdọọ rẹ.
- 125 Okó le dàlń.  
 Háà! Ọún ọ ha ti háá ẹ ?  
 Iyewa ló sì mọọ mọ fòò,  
 Tó ẹ rọgòdò yí.  
 Kò sì sọkúnrin kan lọdọọ rẹ.
- 130 Ngbọọ yá, Ọrúnmilá ní otútù ínmú un diẹ.  
 Ó lóun ì yọ ha fún ọ láşọ kan sí ì.  
 Ó ní bóun ọ bàá tie sùn lókèè 'lé níhín báíí.  
 Iyewá ní bóo wáá ní ?  
 Şé yọọ ha le wọ bẹẹ ?
- 135 Hàà! O lóun tọ ha ẹ pé nkan ló lóun bá a yín.  
 Hain, ó ẹ bẹẹ,  
 Ó sùn lókèè 'lé.



- She asked **Ọrúnmílà** to wait,
- 70 And stop running.  
 She asked him to come along.  
 She took her big wooden tray on which she was  
 washing,  
 And poured out her clothes from it.  
 She asked **Ọrúnmílà** to lie down.
- 75 **Ọrúnmílà** lied down,  
 She covered him up with the wooden tray,  
 And sat upon it.  
**Iyewa** then continued her washing.  
 After a while, and at last,
- 80 Death came in great haste  
 With flies flocking around him,  
 And with his body dripping all over (with blood).  
 He greeted **Iyewa**,  
 And **Iyewa** also greeted him.
- 85 Death asked from her the direction in which  
**Ọrúnmílà** went.  
 But she replied saying, "When you want to kill  
 people,  
 You always rely on your power and take things  
 rather carelessly".  
 She asked whether it was not **Ọrúnmílà** whom  
 death was pursuing.  
 Death replied, "Yes".
- 90 She laughed and said, "Listen carefully  
 Even if he is crawling along,

- Ó lókè odò tó gùn nùsìlín,  
 Ó ló jogójì òkè odò lọ.  
 Ó ní sá fònà ibi tọ lọ hàn 'un.
- 95 Ó lònà tọ lọ nù un.  
 Ikú fòn ọn.  
 Kìrà, kìrà, kìrà, kìrà, kìrà.  
 Ọrúnmilá sá domi mábẹ ọpon  
 Tí Iyewá fi ńfọsọ,
- 100 Tó jókòó lé lérí.  
 Ẹgbẹ́ọ lọ tán,  
 Iyewá ní Ọrúnmilá,  
 Ó ní hiin.  
 Ó loun ọ paşọ ọ 'yókù tì.
- 105 Ó ní mọọ káloọ 'lé.  
 Ó níká nù.  
 Ó ní yọọ pa ọ nù un.  
 LỌrúnmilá bá báyewa lọọ 'lé.  
 Ó fi í yàrá kan.
- 110 Ó tẹní fún un.  
 Lọ lọọ fişuú 'ná.  
 Ó gúnýán.  
 Ó dín eku àtirú.  
 Iyewa sì nì, gbogbo òde tí ńşe,

He must have crossed, by now,  
More than forty rivers”.

But death insisted that she should show him the  
direction in which **Ọrúnmìlà** went.

95 She then said, “That is the way along which he  
went”.

Death started out again,

Running in great haste

While **Ọrúnmìlà** was in great fear underneath the  
wooden tray

On which **Iyewa** was formerly washing,

100 And upon which she now sat.

When death disappeared,

**Iyewa** called upon **Ọrúnmìlà**,

And he answered her.

She then told him that she would leave the re-  
maining clothes unwashed

105 So that **Ọrúnmìlà** could follow her home.

She said, “He (death) is a wicked being,

He would have killed you”.

**Ọrúnmìlà** therefore followed **Iyewa** to her home,

And she gave him a room to stay in.

110 She spread a mat for him on the floor.

She put yams on fire,

And made pounded yam.

She cooked a soup of rats and locust-beans.<sup>9</sup>

Whereas all the menstruation which **Iyewa** had  
been having,

- 115 Àṣedànù ní nṣe é.  
 Ọkọ dà ?  
 Ó fi Ọrúnmilá sí yàrá kan.  
 Iyewá kóó yàrá kan,  
 Ó sùn.
- 120 Ngbọọkàn Ọrúnmilá balẹ tán,  
 Tó jiyán, nnú ẹ ẹ nà tọtọ.  
 Tó jeku, tọ jẹrú,  
 Tára ẹ ẹ yá,  
 Ó ti gbàgbé ajogun tó le e dọdọọ rẹ.
- 125 Okó le dàlín.  
 Háà! Ọún ọ ha ti háá ẹ ?  
 Iyewa ló sì mọọ mọ fòdò,  
 Tó ẹ rọ̀gòdò yí.  
 Kò sì sọkùnrin kan lọdọọ rẹ.
- 130 Ngbọọ yá, Ọrúnmilá ní otútù ínmú un diẹ.  
 Ó lóun ì yọ ha fún ọ láṣọ kan sí i.  
 Ó ní boun ọ bàá tiẹ sùn lókèè 'lé níhín báíí.  
 Iyewá ní bóó wáá ni ?  
 Sẹ yọọ ha le wọ bẹẹ ?
- 135 Hàà! O lóun tọ ha ẹ pé nkan ló lóun bá a yín.  
 Hain, ó ẹ bẹẹ,  
 Ó sùn lókèè 'lé.

- 115 Were all wasted  
Since she had no husband.  
She lodged **Ọrúnmilà** in one room,  
She entered her own room,  
And went to sleep.
- 120 When **Ọrúnmilà**'s mind came to perfect peace  
After eating pounded yam to his satisfaction,  
And after eating a soup of rats and locust-beans  
Which restored his energy,  
He forgot all the perils which brought him to  
**Iyewa**.
- 125 His pennis became turgid.  
He wondered what he could do.  
And **Iyewa** was a light-complexioned person  
With a fleshy and neat body.  
But she had no man living with her.
- 130 After some time, **Ọrúnmilà** complained of cold,  
And **Yewa** asked whether he would need another  
wrapper.  
But instead **Ọrúnmilà** suggested that he should  
move near the door (in the room where she was  
sleeping).  
To which **Iyewa** said, "How ?  
I hope that will not cause any disturbance ?"
- 135 But **Ọrúnmilà** replied that he did not forget that he  
was driven to her by force of circumstances.  
He therefore did as he suggested,  
And slept near the door (inside her bed-room).

Ọ̀rúnmilà èè sùn tán,  
Té e fọ́ọ sóorunpá.

- 140 Bẹ̀ẹ́ ló ẹ̀ wọ́ wọ́ wọ́,  
Bẹ̀ẹ́ ló ẹ̀ kan Iyewa.  
Obiín sá pirọ́ọ mọ̀lẹ́.  
O di pỌ̀rúnmilà nfa aṣọ.  
Iyewa ọ̀ fọ̀hùn mọ́.
- 145 Ẹ̀gbòun náàá sì ti gbọ́ pé . . . . .  
Tí ọ̀ sì lọ́mọ kan tì nìbìkan.  
Òde tí nṣe àṣedànù nì.  
Ọ̀rúnmilá lọ́ mọ́ Iyewa.  
Iyewa náà fì ọ́jọ́ ayéé 'lẹ́ fun.
- 150 Ó bẹ̀rẹ̀ sì isẹ́ẹ́ ẹ̀,  
Ó sì ẹ̀ é bẹ̀ẹ́,  
Ilẹ́ẹ́ sì e mọ́.  
Ó tọ́jú onjẹ́ àárọ́ fun tán,  
Ó ní mọ́ọ́ lọ́lẹ́,
- 155 Ikú lọ́ nù un.  
Ó nÍkú èé pòòrì ilé èyà̀n lẹ̀ẹ̀mejì.  
Ọ̀rúnmilá délẹ́,  
Tóò! ọ́ gbọ́dọ́ . . . . .  
Egbẹ̀ẹ́ nIyewa tẹ̀lẹ́.

- Òrúnmìlà** had hardly lied down,  
 When he started to behave like a somnambulist.
- 140 That was how he crawled and crawled  
 Until he got to **Iyewa**.  
 But the lady pretended to be asleep.  
**Òrúnmìlà** started to remove her clothes,  
 But she said nothing again.
- 145 And since she too had heard that . . . . .  
 And since she had no children.  
 All her menstruations were not followed up by  
 sexual intercourse.  
**Òrúnmìlà** clung to **Iyewa**,  
 And she too cooperated with him.
- 150 He started to work upon her,  
 And he did like that  
 Until the following morning.  
 After preparing breakfast for him,  
 She told him to go home,
- 155 Because death had gone away.  
 And assured him that death does not go to the  
 same house twice (without sufficient time lag)<sup>10</sup>.  
 When **Òrúnmìlà** got home,  
 He dared not . . . . .  
 Since **Iyewa** was not his equal.

- 160 Ọlăa rẹẹ ju tiẹ lọ,  
 Ipòò rẹẹ ju tiẹ lọ.  
 Ọrúnmlà, kín ló ní tẹlẹ.  
 Ó ti mọkàn kúò níbẹ  
 Pé, tódò, òún róore jọkan ẹ nù un.
- 165 Oşùú lé, Iyewa ọ bá róde mọọ.  
 Iyewá ní kín lọ kọ lù un.  
 Lóun tóun ò tí ẹ,  
 Bọyọkùnrin ỉ kárùn ràn 'un ní.  
 Ó tún wò ó lójú,
- 170 Oşù kejii tún yí lé e.  
 Ó di pé bí wọn bá pàdé Iyewa lóde,  
 Wọn a ní hà!  
 Iyewa, kín nì nla  
 A mọ bọ ọ yọ o.
- 175 Ọlọun ọ sọ ọ kalẹ o.  
 Àşejálẹ 1Ọlọun ó ẹ é o.  
 Iyewá ní kín nì ?  
 Ñjóun ò níí run láyé.  
 Ñgbà tó dé inúu 'lé,
- 180 Owó lọ kà,  
 Ọ ràgbébọ adẹ,



- 160 She belonged to a higher social status.  
Her position in society was higher than his.  
Since **Ọrúnmìlà** realized his inferior position,  
He did not keep in mind their friendship.  
He dismissed it as a passing experience of only one day.
- 165 The next month, **Iyewa** did not see her menstruation again.  
She wondered what was wrong with her  
Since she had never lost her menstruation before.  
She thought that probably she had got a venereal disease (from their intercourse).  
She started to watch for further developments
- 170 Until the second month.  
After some time, when people met **Iyewa** outside,  
They expressed their surprise saying :  
“**Iyewa**, could it be true ?  
We rejoice with you.
- 175 God will grant you a peaceful delivery.  
God will make you carry it to full maturity”.  
**Iyewa** herself started to wonder  
And to feel happy at the prospect of leaving behind her own survivor in life.  
When she got home,
- 180 She took some money,  
And bought some hens,

- Ó rewúré,  
 Èrùuṣu ò wínrìn, èlùbọ.  
 Lọ bá fọn ọn,
- 185 Ó dilé Ọrúnmilà,  
 Ní nlọ́ọ rá ndií òkè ipọ́rí ẹ.  
 Òun, bèẹ yà kọ?  
 A jẹ rí bèẹ jálẹ,  
 Tóun ò ní nkan kan tì 'ibìkan.
- 190 Nnkan nnkàn,  
 Ọ sá kò mọ kiní ií.  
 Ní bá nṣẹ̀sìn,  
 Èsìn yí kúò níwọn.  
 Nígba tí ó dònká sìkẹwàá,
- 195 Wẹẹẹ ọmọ.  
 Iyewá bímọ,  
 A nńwá nńáwó nù un mọ,  
 Ọtí ọ mẹ́ẹ́rí,  
 Obi, ẹran,
- 200 Gbogbo nkan gbáà,  
 Ní 'ọn dìjọ fọtùún ilú,  
 Osii 'lú,  
 Àwọn agogo nÍpòóró,  
 Aràn nÍkijà,

- Some goats,  
Many loads of yams and yam-flour.  
She started out,
- 185 And went to Ọrúnmilà's house.  
When she got there, she prayed to his Ifá instruments  
Asking herself whether it could be true,  
And praying that it should finally become true  
Since she had never had a child before.
- 190 She started to say all sorts of things in bewilderment.  
She started out seriously,  
Praying and worshipping  
Beyond all expectations.  
In the tenth month by inclusive counting,
- 195 The cry of a new baby was heard.  
Iyewa had a baby.  
The ceremony and festivities were beyond description.  
Drinks were inexhaustible.  
So were kolanuts and meat.
- 200 They sent packages of all good things  
To the ọtún <sup>11</sup> of the town,  
And the ọ̀sì <sup>12</sup> of the town.  
They offered same to those who beat the Ifá gong,  
Those who beat the àràn drums, <sup>13</sup>

- 205 Ọpá kugúkugù lóde Ịşerimogbe.  
 Wọn bẹrẹ síí jó.  
 Wọn ńyọ.  
 Wọn ní bẹẹ gégé ní àwọn awo àwọn ńşenuu 're,  
 Tí 'ọn fí ńpe 'Fá.
- 210 Ịjanrígí lawo Ịjanrígí.  
 Ịjanrìgì lawo Ịjanrìgì.  
 Ịjanrìgì jagada.  
 Dífá fỌrùnmilà,  
 Ifá dá 'Dingbè
- 215 Wọn ní ikú dé.  
 Ọrùnmilà, n lọ sá, sáá, sá,  
 Ó sì bá 'Yewa lódò,  
 Bẹẹ nIyewá sì şe mú Ọrùnmilà wolé lọ.  
 Ọrùnmilà ló şòdee 'Yewa.
- 220 Ó sì fí bí,  
 Ó ní kọ mọ mọ jẹ nkú nù.  
 Iyewa, kọ mọ mọ jẹ nkú nù,  
 Iyewa.  
 Ngbà Iyewá ọ bàá sì dáhùn,
- 225 A ní, kọ mọ mọ jẹ njágàn o,  
 Baraapetu,

- 205 And those who use sticks to make melodious music.  
 They started to dance,  
 And to rejoice.  
 They said that was exactly how their Ifá priests  
 employed their good voices  
 In praise of Ifá.
- 210 **Ìjanrígí**, Ifá priest of **Ìjanrígí**;  
**Ìjanrígí**, Ifá priest of **Ìjanrígí**;  
**Ìjanrígí**, whose other name was **Jagada**,  
 Performed divination for **Òrúnmìlà**  
 When he cast **Ìdingbè**,
- 215 And he was warned about imminent death.  
**Òrúnmìlà** was the one who ran and ran  
 Until he met **Iyewa** in the river.  
 And she took **Òrúnmìlà** home.  
**Òrúnmìlà** had sexual intercourse with **Iyewa**,
- 220 And it resulted in the birth of a child.  
 He said, "She saved me from perishing.  
**Iyewa** saved me from perishing.  
**Iyewa**"  
 And **Iyewa** also answered him thus:
- 225 "He saved me from childlessness.  
**Baraapetu**.

Kò mò mò jẹ njàgàn,  
Baraapetu.  
Kò mò mò jẹ njàgàn o,

230 Baraapetu,  
Kò mò mò jẹ njàgàn.  
Baraapetu.  
Kò mò mò jẹ nkú sọ̀nù o,  
Iyewa,

235 Kò mò mò jẹ nkú sọ̀nù.  
Iyewa.

He saved me from childlessness.

**Baraapetu.**

He saved me from childlessness.

230 **Baraapetu.**

He saved me from childlessness.

**Baraapetu”.**

“She saved me from perishing.

**Iyewa.**

235 She saved me from perishing.

**Iyewa.”**

## NOTES

1. **Ìjanrígí.** This word, which has been played upon here in the second and third lines, is the name of an Ifá priest.
2. **Ìdìngbè.** One of the 256 minor Odù of Ifá.
3. **Òkè ipòrí.** This refers here to Òrúnmílà's Ifá divination instruments.
4. In traditional Yoruba society, many people lived in large compounds with one or two entrances. The appartments in each compound are either built together to form one block containing many rooms or they may be built in form of separate houses joined together to form one compound. Each compound encloses a large open space in which children could play and where adults could hold meetings or stay in the evening to rest after the normal day's work.
5. **Àgbìrà** is a bag carried by Ifá priests inside which they keep their divination instruments.
6. "As far as **Ìbàdàn**" here refers to about thirty-three miles the distance between Òyó, where this poem was recorded, and **Ìbàdàn**.
7. 'Yewa is a shortened form of the word "Iyewa", a personal name. Iyewa is also the name of a river.
8. This is one of the appellations of **Òrúnmílà** and it refers to his divine and divinatory power which makes him able to know the future and interpret it.
9. Rats and locust-beans are some of the things usually offered to **Òrúnmílà**, and they are believed to be his favourite food.
10. It is believed that once death has failed to kill a person after visiting his abode once, it takes him a long time to return to that person again.



11. **Ọtún.** The deputy of the ruler of any place.  
**Ọtún** literally means “right” and the bearer of that title sits to the right of the actual ruler or king of the town.
12. **Ọsì** literally means “left” and refers to the third person in rank to the king or ruler of the town. The person who bears this title sits to the left of the king.
13. **Àràn** drum is one of the most important drums of Ifá. (see introduction pages 19 and 20 for more details).

## v. Orí As Each Individual's Personal Òrìṣà

The following poem contains a myth about how **Òrúnmìlà** proved to the other òrìṣà that concerning care and devotion to human beings, **Orí** is the most important of them all. In the story, **Òrúnmìlà** assembled all the gods in one place and asked which of them could follow his own devotee to the farthest place imaginable without turning back. **Şàngó**, the bravest of all the òrìṣà, was the first to reply saying that as far as he was concerned, he could follow any of his own devotees to any place without ever turning back. But when **Òrúnmìlà** asked him what he would do if in the course of the journey, they reached **Kòso**, his home, **Şàngò** answered immediately that he would first of all call at his home, eat his favourite food and see all his relations before he continued the journey. One by one, **Òrúnmìlà** asked the other òrìṣà the same question and they all gave replies similar to **Şàngò's**.

When **Òrúnmìlà** himself confessed that there was a limit to which he himself could follow his devotee without ever turning back, the other òrìṣà were disturbed and they begged him to tell them the meaning of his story. It was then that **Òrúnmìlà** said :

“It is **Orí**,

It is **Orí** alone,

Who could follow his own devotee  
to a distant journey over the seas  
(without ever turning back)”.

The point of this story is to demonstrate the importance of **Orí** in the life of every individual. The Yoruba conceive of **Orí** as each individual's own guardian and divinity. The other **Òrìṣà** are for the public at large. Although they cater for the interest of individuals, they

cannot do this as effectively as **Orí** whose duty it is to protect the individual and lead him to his chosen destiny. The **Òriṣà** cannot do this effectively because there are many people clamouring every day for their support and protection while **Orí** has only one individual to cater for.

As far as the protection of each individual's interest is concerned, **Orí** could be regarded as the most important divinity of all. In fact, it is the belief of the Yoruba that whatever is not sanctioned by one's **Orí** cannot be done for one by the other **Òriṣà**. Therefore, while the other gods are intermediaries between man and **Olódùmarè** (the Almighty God), **Orí** is another intermediary between man and the other **Òriṣà**. For this reason, it is **Orí** alone who could bring blessings to human beings faster and more reliably than the other **Òriṣà**. That is why the story closes with words:

**“Orí, I hail you.**

**You, who always remembers your own devotee.**

**You who brings blessings to your devotee more quickly than the other gods.**

**No god blesses a man without the consent of his Orí.**

**Orí, I hail you.**

**You, who allows children to be born alive.**

**A person whose sacrifice is accepted by his own Orí**

**Should rejoice exceedingly”.**

Ọ̀rúnmílá lẹ̀ dọ̀dẹ̀dẹ̀ nìbẹ̀rẹ̀,  
Ífá, mo ní, ta ló tó Alásàán bá ròkun ?  
Sàngó ní òún tó Alásàán bá ròkun.  
Wọn ní òjẹ̀ bọ̀ ọ̀ bá rìn tíítí,

- 5 Bọ̀ ọ̀ bá bùrìn bùrìn,  
Bọ̀ ọ̀ bá dé Kòso,  
Ilée bàbàà rẹ̀ ńkọ̀ ?  
Bí wọn bá se gbẹ̀girl,  
Bí wọn bá rokà,
- 10 Bí wọn bá fún ọ̀ lórógbó,  
Àtàkùkọ̀ adieyẹ̀ kan ńkọ̀ ?  
Sàngó ní bí mo bá ti yó tán,  
N ọ̀ padà sílẹ̀ mi ní.  
Wọn ní Sàngó ò tó Alásàán bá ròkun.
- 15 Ọ̀rúnmílá lẹ̀ dọ̀dẹ̀dẹ̀ nìbẹ̀rẹ̀,  
Ífá, mo ní, ta ló tó Alásàán bá ròkun ?  
Ọ̀yá ní òún tó Alásàán bá ròkun.  
Wọn ní òjẹ̀ bọ̀ ọ̀ bá rìn tíítí,  
Bọ̀ ọ̀ bá bùrìn bùrìn,
- 20 Bọ̀ ọ̀ bá délee 'Rá,  
Ilée bàbàà rẹ̀ ńkọ̀ ?  
Bí wọn bá pọ̀dà tó tóbi,  
Bí wọn bá fún ọ̀ ní ìkòkò ègboò kan ńkọ̀ ?

**Ọrúnmílà** said that one always bends down when entering the doorway.<sup>1</sup>

Ifá asked the question, "Who among you gods could follow your devotee to a distant journey over the seas?"<sup>2</sup>

**Ẹ̀ṣàngó**<sup>3</sup> answered that he could follow his devotee to a distant journey over the seas.

The question was asked from him, "What will you do if after travelling for a long distance,

5 Walking and walking,

You arrive at **Kòsò**,<sup>4</sup>

The home of your fathers ?

If they prepare **gbẹ̀gírí** <sup>5</sup> soup,

And they prepare yam-flour pudding.<sup>6</sup>

10 If they offer you bitter kola,

And a cock?"<sup>7</sup>

**Ẹ̀ṣàngó** answered, "After eating to my satisfaction, I will return to my home."

**Ẹ̀ṣàngó** was told that he could not follow his devotee to a distant journey over the seas.

15 **Ọrúnmílà** said that one always bends down when entering the doorway.

Ifá asked the question, "Who among you gods could follow your devotee to a distant journey over the seas?"

**Ọyá** <sup>8</sup> answered that she could follow her devotee to a distant journey over the seas.

The question was asked from her, "What will you do if after travelling for a long distance,

Walking and walking,

20 You arrive at the city of **Írá**,<sup>9</sup>

The home of your fathers ?

If they kill a big animal,

And they offer you a big pot of **ẹ̀gbò**?"<sup>10</sup>

- Qyá ní bí mo bá ti yó tán o,  
 25 N ọ padà sílèè mi ni.  
 Wón ní Qya ò tó Alásàán bá ròkun.  
 Ọrúnmilá lẹ dọdẹdẹ nibẹrẹ,  
 Ifá, mo ní, ta ló tó Alásàán bá ròkun ?  
 Òòṣàálá ní òún tó Alásàán bá ròkun.
- 30 Wón ní òjẹ ọ bá rìn tíí,  
 Ọ ọ bá búrìn búrìn,  
 Ọ ọ bá déléé 'Fón,  
 Ilée bàbàà rẹ òkọ ?  
 Bí wón bá pa àgbébo adíẹ tọ rọyin sínú,
- 35 Bí wón bá mú igba ìgbín,  
 Tí wón ti sè ní òsíki òkọ ?  
 Òòṣàálá ní bí mo bá ti yó tán,  
 N ọ padà sílèè mi ni.  
 Wón ní Òòṣàálá ò tó Alásàán bá ròkun.
- 40 Ọrúnmilá lẹ dọdẹdẹ nibẹrẹ,  
 Ifá, mo ní, ta ló tó Alásàán bá ròkun ?  
 Elégbáraá ní òún tó Alásàán bá ròkun.  
 Wón ní òjẹ ọ bá rìn tíí,  
 Ọ ọ bá búrìn búrìn,
- 45 Ọ ọ bá déléé Kétu,

- Oya** answered saying, "After eating to my satisfaction,  
 25 I will return to my home."  
**Oya** was told that she could not follow her devotee to a distant journey over the seas.  
**Òrúnmìlà** said that one always bends down when entering the doorway.  
**Ifá** asked the question, "Who among you gods could follow your devotee to a distant journey over the seas?"  
**Òòṣàálá** <sup>11</sup> answered that he could follow his devotee to a distant journey over the seas.  
 30 The question was asked from him, "What will you do if after travelling for a long distance, Walking and walking, You arrive at the city of **Ifón**,<sup>12</sup> The home of your fathers? If they kill for you one big hen pregnant with eggs.  
 35 If they offer you two hundred snails Seasoned with vegetable and melon soup"?<sup>13</sup>  
**Òòṣàálá** answered saying, "After eating to my satisfaction, I will return to my home."  
**Òòṣàálá** was told that he could not follow his devotee to a distant journey over the seas.  
 40 **Òrúnmìlà** said that one always bends down when entering the doorway.  
**Ifá** asked the question, "Who among you gods could follow your devotee to a distant journey over the seas?"  
**Elégbára**<sup>14</sup> answered that he could follow his devotee to a distant journey over the seas.  
 The question was asked from him, "What will you do if after travelling for a long distance, Walking and walking,  
 45 You arrive at the city of **Kétu**,<sup>15</sup>

- Ilée bàbàà rẹ́ ñkọ́ ?  
 Bí wọn bá fún ọ lákùkọ adìẹ,  
 Pẹ̀lú ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀ epo ñkọ́ ?  
 Èlẹ̀gbáraá ní bí mo bá ti yó tán,
- 50 N ọ padà sílẹ̀è mi ní.  
 Wọn ní Èlẹ̀gbára ò tó Alásàán bá ròkun.  
 Ọ̀rúnmilá lọ̀ dọ̀dẹ̀dẹ̀ nìbẹ̀rẹ̀,  
 Ifá, mo ní, ta ló tó Alásàán bá ròkun ?  
 Ọ̀gún ní òún tó Alásàán bá ròkun.
- 55 Wọn ní òjẹ̀ bọ̀ ọ̀ bá rìn tí tí,  
 Bọ̀ ọ̀ bá bùrìn bùrìn,  
 Bọ̀ ọ̀ bá délẹ̀è 'Rẹ̀,  
 Ilée bàbàà rẹ́ ñkọ́ ?  
 Bí wọn bá fún ọ lẹ̀wà èyan,
- 60 Bí wọn bá bèjá fún ọ tán,  
 Tí wọn fàkùkọ adìẹ sẹ̀bòsẹ̀ rẹ̀,  
 Bí wọn bá fún ọ lẹ̀tí àti ẹ̀mu ñkọ́ ?  
 Ọ̀gún ní bí mo bá ti yó tán o,  
 Ìjálá tan taan tan,
- 65 Ni n ọ maa sun bọ̀ wálẹ̀è mi.  
 Wọn ní Ọ̀gún ò tó Alásàán bá ròkun.  
 Ọ̀rúnmilá lọ̀ dọ̀dẹ̀dẹ̀ nìbẹ̀rẹ̀,  
 Ifá, mo ní, ta ló tó Alásàán bá ròkun ?



The home of your fathers ?

If they offer you a cock,

And plenty of palm-oil ?”<sup>16</sup>

**Èlégbára** answered saying, “After eating to my satisfaction,

50 I will return to my home.”

**Èlégbára** was told that he could not follow his devotee to a distant journey over the seas.

**Òrúnmìlà** said that one always bends down when entering the doorway.

Ifá asked the question, “Who among you gods can follow your devotee to a distant journey over the seas ?”

**Ògún**<sup>17</sup> answered that he could follow his devotee to a distant journey over the seas.

55 The question was asked from him, “What will you do if after travelling for a long distance, Walking and walking,

You arrive at **Ìrè**,<sup>18</sup>

The home of your fathers ?

If they offer you fried beans,

60 And they kill a dog for you

Together with a hen.

If they offer you guinea-corn beer and palm-wine ?”<sup>19</sup>

**Ògún** answered saying, “After eating to my satisfaction,

I will chant **Ìjálá**<sup>20</sup> loudly and joyously

65 Back to my home.”

**Ògún** was told that he could not follow his devotee to a distant journey over the seas.

**Òrúnmìlà** said that one always bends down when entering the doorway.

Ifá asked the question, “Who among you gods could follow your devotee to a distant journey over the seas ?”

Ọṣún ní òún tó Alásàán bá ròkun.

- 70 Wọn ní òjẹ̀ ọ̀ bá rìn títí,  
Bọ̀ ọ̀ bá búrìn búrìn,  
Bọ̀ ọ̀ bá dé 'Jùmú,  
Ilée bàbàà rẹ̀ ńkọ̀ ?  
Bí wọn bá fún ọ̀ lẹ̀pẹ̀lẹ̀pẹ̀ ẹ̀kọ̀,
- 75 Pẹ̀lú ẹ̀fọ̀ yánrìn àtì sẹ̀kẹ̀tẹ̀ ńkọ̀ ?  
Ọṣún ní bí mo bá tì yó tán o,  
Idẹ̀ wẹ̀rẹ̀wẹ̀rẹ̀ nì n ó fì sẹ̀sin gùn wálẹ̀ mi.  
Wọn l'Ọṣun ò tó Alásàán bá ròkun.  
Ọ̀rúnmilá lẹ̀ dọ̀dẹ̀dẹ̀ nìbẹ̀rẹ̀,
- 80 Ifá, mo ní, ta ló tó Alásàán bá ròkun ?  
Ọ̀rúnmilá ní òún tó Alásàán bá ròkun.  
Wọn ní òjẹ̀ ọ̀ bá rìn títí,  
Bọ̀ ọ̀ bá búrìn búrìn,  
Bọ̀ ọ̀ bá dókẹ̀ Ìgẹ̀tí,
- 85 Ilée bàbàà rẹ̀ ńkọ̀ ?  
Bí wọn bá fún ọ̀ léku méjì olùwéré,  
Eja méjì abìwẹ̀gbàdà,  
Obídiẹ̀ méjì abẹ̀dọ̀ lùkẹ̀lùkẹ̀,  
Ewúré méjì abàmú rẹ̀dẹ̀rẹ̀dẹ̀,
- 90 Ẹ̀nlá méjì tó fiwo sọ̀sùkà.

Ọṣun<sup>21</sup> answered that she could follow her devotee to a distant journey over the seas.

- 70 The question was asked from her, "What will you do if after travelling a long distance,  
Walking and walking,  
You arrive at Ịjùmú,<sup>22</sup>  
The home of your fathers ?  
If they give you plenty of corn-starch pudding

- 75 Together with yánrin vegetable<sup>23</sup> and maize beer?<sup>24</sup>  
Ọṣun answered saying, "After eating to my satisfaction,  
I will ride upon small pieces of brass back to my home".

Ọṣun was told that she could not follow her devotee to a distant journey over the seas.

Ọrúnmílà said that one always bends down when entering the doorway.

- 80 Ifá asked the question, "Who among you gods could follow your devotee to a distant journey over the sea ?"

Ọrúnmílà said that he could follow his devotee to a distant journey over the seas.

The question was asked from him, "What will you do if after travelling for a long distance,  
Walking and walking,  
You arrive at Ịgètí hill,<sup>25</sup>

- 85 The home of your fathers ?  
If they offer you two fast-moving rats,  
Two fish that swim gracefully,  
Two hens with big livers,  
Two goats heavy with foetus,

- 90 Two cows with fat horns ?"

- Bí wọn bá gúnyán,  
 Tí wọn rokà,  
 Bọ ọ bá gbọtí abọda,  
 Bọ ọ bá gbata tí ò sǫjú,  
 95 Bọ ọ bá gbobì tí ọ làdọ.  
 Ọrúnmilá ní bí mo bá ti yó tán o,  
 N ó padà wálée mi ni.  
 Wọn ní Ọrúnmilà ò tó Alásàán bá ròkun.  
 Akápò, é è jùsì,  
 100 É è sọrọ,  
 É è jáwe.  
 Ọrúnmilà, mo jẹwọ ọbùn.  
 Wáá dásọ ró mi,  
 Mápó Eléré,  
 105 Mòkun Ọtan,  
 Mèsín ilée 'Láwẹ.  
 Mápó Eléjẹlú,  
 Gbólájókòó, ọmọ ọkinkin,  
 Tíí mériín fọn.  
 110 Ọrúnmilà, iwọ laráa 'wájú,  
 Èmi lèrò ẹyin,  
 Ẹ bí iwọ lẹ́ọ kọmọ lẹ́ràn bí-iyekan ọmọ.  
 Ifá, mo ní, ta ló tó Alásàán bá ròkun ?

If they prepare pounded yam,  
And they prepare yam-flour pudding.  
If you take well-brewed guinea-corn beer,  
And you take alligator pepper,

95 And good kolanuts ?”

**Ọ́rúnmílà** answered saying, “After eating to my  
satisfaction,

I will return to my home.”

**Ọ́rúnmílà** was told that he could not follow his  
devotee to a distant journey over the seas.

Ifá priest was dumbfounded.

100 He could not say a word  
Because he didn't understand the parable.

**Ọ́rúnmílà**, I confess my helplessness.

Please, clothe me with wisdom,

**Màpó** in the city of **Eléré**,<sup>26</sup>

105 **Mòkún** of the town of **Ọ́tan**,<sup>27</sup>

**Mèsín** of the city of **Ìlávẹ́**.<sup>28</sup>

**Màpó** in the city of **Elẹ́jẹlú**.<sup>29</sup>

**Gbólájókòó**,<sup>30</sup> offspring of tusks  
That make the elephant trumpet.

110 **Ọ́rúnmílà**, you are the leader,

I am the follower.

You are the sage who teaches one wise things  
like one's relation.

Ifá, the question is, “Who among the gods can  
follow his devotee to a distant journey over  
the seas ?”

- Ifá ní orí,
- 115 Orí nìkàn  
 Ló tó Alásàán bá ròkun.  
 Ọ̀rúnmílá ní bí babaláwoó bá kú,  
 Wọn a ní ẹ̀ lọ ru Ifáa rẹ̀ dà sí kòtò.  
 Bí adósùu Sàngó bá kú,
- 120 Wọn a ní ẹ̀ kó Sàngó ẹ̀ dànù.  
 Bí akápò Ọ̀ṣàálá bá kú,  
 Wọn a ní ẹ̀ kó gbogbo ǹnkan ẹ̀ tọ̀ ọ̀.  
 Ọ̀rúnmílá ní nìjọ̀ tí èyàn tí ǹkú,  
 Ta ni wọ̀n gé oríi rẹ̀ ẹ̀ lẹ̀ ?
- 125 Ifá ní orí o,  
 Orí nìkàn  
 Ló tó Alásàán bá ròkun.  
 Bí mo bá lówó lẹ̀wọ̀,  
 Orí ni n ó rò fún.
- 130 Oríi mi, iwọ̀ ni.  
 Bi mo bá bímọ̀ láyé,  
 Orí ni n ó rò fún.  
 Oríi mi, iwọ̀ ni.  
 Ire gbogbo tí mo bá rí láyé,
- 135 Orí ni n ó rò fún.

Ifá said, "It is **Orí**,

- 115 It is **Orí** alone,  
Who can follow his own devotee to a distant  
journey over the seas."

**Ọ̀rúnmìlà** said, "When an Ifá priest dies,  
People may ask that his divination instruments  
should be thrown into the ditch."

When a devotee of **Ẹ̀ṣàngó** dies,

- 120 People may say that his **Ẹ̀ṣàngó** instruments should  
be thrown away.

When a devotee of **Ọ̀ṣàálá** dies,  
People may ask that his paraphernalia should be  
buried with him."

**Ọ̀rúnmìlà** asked, "Ever since human beings have  
been dying,

Whose head is ever severed from his body before  
burial?"

- 125 Ifá said, "It is **Orí**,  
It is **Orí** alone,  
Who can follow his own devotee to a distant  
journey over the seas without turning back."  
If I have money,  
It is **Orí** whom I will praise.

- 130 My **Orí**, it is you.  
If I have children on earth,  
It is **Orí** whom I will praise.  
My **Orí**, it is you.  
All the good things that I have on earth,

- 135 It is my **Orí** to whom I will give my praise.

Oríì mi, ìwọ ni.  
Orí pẹlẹ,  
Atèté níran,  
Atèté gbe ni kòòṣà.

140 Kò sóòṣà tíí dáníí gbè,  
Léyìn orí ẹni.  
Orí pẹlẹ,  
Orí àbíyè.  
Ẹni orí bá gbẹgbọọ rẹ,

145 Kọ yò sẹsẹ.



My **Orí**, it is you.

**Orí**, I hail you.

You who always remembers your devotee.

You who gives blessing to your devotee more  
quickly than other gods.

140 No god blesses a man

Without the consent of his **Orí**.

**Orí**, I hail you.

You who allows children to be born alive.

A person whose sacrifice is accepted by his own  
**Orí**

145 Should rejoice exceedingly.

## NOTES

1. The doorways to many traditional Yoruba homes are not high so that when one enters the room one has to bend down to avoid hitting one's head on the wall above.
2. "Over the seas" here refers to any distant journey especially one in which there are many odds on the way.
3. **Ẓàngó**. The Yoruba thunder and lightning god. He is regarded as the boldest of all the **Òrìṣà**. One is therefore not surprised that the first answer to **Òrúnmìlà**'s question came from him.
4. **Kòso**. Refers to a place in old **Ọ̀yọ́** where **Ẓàngó** devotees lived.
5. **Gbẹ̀giri** soup. A highly nutritious soup made from beans and condiments.
6. Yam-flour pudding. This food known as **ọ̀kà** is the favourite food of the **Ọ̀yọ́** Yoruba and it is also the favourite food of **Ẓàngó**. When offered to **Ẓàngó**, **ọ̀kà** must be made into many small lumps because **Ẓàngó** is believed to be a very great eater.
7. Bitter kola and a cock. These are also part of the favourite food of **Ẓàngó**. Cocks and rams are also offered to **Ẓàngó**.
8. **Ọ̀ya**. The wife of **Ẓàngó** is a Yoruba **òrìṣà** believed to be a fierce and terrible woman like **Ẓàngó**, her husband.
9. **Irá**. Name of a place believed to be in Nupeland in the north of the Yoruba country which is said to be the home of **Ọ̀ya**.
10. **Ègbo**. A food made out of cooked and marshed maize.

11. **Òṣàálá.** The Yoruba creation god. He is believed to be the moulder of human beings in heaven. He is also known as **Ọ̀bàtálá** and **Òṣà-funfun** (the white god) because all the instruments and symbols associated with him are white. His priests and priestesses wear only white uniform.
12. **Ifón.** A town in **Ọ̀wọ̀** division of Yorubaland believed to be the home of **Òṣàálá**.
13. Two hundred snails seasoned with vegetable and melon soup. **Òṣàálá** loves snail because its meat is white and has no blood. He also takes melon soup because it is white.
14. **Ẹ̀légbára.** Another name for **Ẹ̀ṣù**, the Yoruba trickster god. **Ẹ̀ṣù** is believed to be the ubiquitous policeman who punishes offenders and rewards the faithful on behalf of the gods. It is he who receives all sacrifices on behalf of the **Ọ̀rìṣà**. Furthermore, **Ẹ̀ṣù** is the keeper of **àṣẹ**, the divine and highly potent power with which the gods perform their supernatural deeds.
15. **Kétu.** An important Yoruba town in Dahomey which is believed to be the home of **Ẹ̀légbára**. The cult of that god is still very strong at **Kétu**.
16. A cock and plenty of palm-oil. These are some of the favourite foods of **Ẹ̀ṣù**. It is believed that palm-oil quietens the violent anger of **Ẹ̀ṣù**.
17. **Ọ̀gún.** The Yoruba god of war and heroism whose symbol is iron. He is worshipped by all those who make use of iron — blacksmiths, hunters, butchers etc. Hunters are however the most notable among the many devotees of this important **Ọ̀rìṣà**.
18. **Ìrè.** A town in **Ẹ̀kítì** area believed by some people to be the home of **Ọ̀gún**. Some other people however believe that **Ṣakí** in the north of **Ọ̀yọ̀** was the original home of the iron god.

19. Guinea-corn beer and palm-wine. **Ògún** is reputed to be a very great drinkard. Unlike some of the other gods, it is not forbidden for **Ògún** and his worshippers to drink alcohol.
20. **Ìjálá**. The traditional poetry of the hunters. This very rich genre of Yoruba oral poetry is chanted by hunters mainly for purposes of entertainment as well as during the performance of hunter's festivals and rituals.
21. **Ọṣun**. An important Yoruba god whose most important symbol is the river which bears the same name. She is believed to be a great lover of children. Hence most of her devotees are women who are either looking for children or are nursing mothers. The annual festival of **Ọṣun** at **Ọṣogbo**, an important town seventy miles north-west of **Ìbàdàn**, is till today one of the most important Yoruba traditional festivals.
22. **Ìjùmú**. A place in the north of Yorubaland believed to be the home of **Ọṣun**.
23. **Yánrin** vegetable. This vegetable grows wild especially in newly cultivated lands. It is one of the best known Yoruba vegetable foods.
24. Maize beer. This is known as **ṣẹkẹtẹ**. It is taken by devotees of **Ọṣun** who are forbidden to drink guinea-corn beer.
25. **Ìgẹtí** hill. A place at **Ifẹ** believed to be the place where **Ọrúnmilà** stayed for a very long time while on earth.
26. **Màpó** in the city of **Eléré**. The title "Màpó" is given to **Ọrúnmilà** in the town of **Eléré**.
27. **Mòkun** of the town of **Ọtan**. **Ọrúnmilà** is given the title of **Mòkun**, an important traditional title of the town of **Ọtan** in **Èkítì** territory.

28. **Mẹsín** of the city of **Ìláwẹ̀**. **Mẹsín** is the title given to **Ọ̀rúnmìlà** in **Ìláwẹ̀**, an **Èkìtì** town which is usually mentioned in Ifá literary corpus.
29. **Ẹ̀lẹ̀jẹ̀lú**. Name of the ruler a place in **Èkìtì** area known as **Ìjẹ̀lú**.
30. **Gbọ́lájókòó**. Personal name meaning "He who sits honour up".
31. This refers to the fact that nowadays many young people do not wish to become devotees of Yoruba gods because of the sanctions and strict, highly disciplined pattern of living associated with the **òrìṣà** cults.

vi. **Àjàlá and the Choice of Orí**

The following poem tells the story of how **Orí** is chosen in **òrun** (heaven) and the consequences of this irrevocable choice on every individual. The story concerns three friends — **Orísẹ̀ẹ̀kú** (the son of **Ògún**) **Orílẹ̀émèrè** (the son of **Ìja**) and **Afùwàpẹ** (the son of **Ọ̀rúnmìlà**) — who were going to the abode of **Olódùmarè** to choose **Orí**". The three friends were warned, probably by people who knew the problems of people going on the long journey, not to stop anywhere on the way but to go directly to the home of **Àjàlá**, "the potter who makes heads in **òrun**". The two friends, **Orísẹ̀ẹ̀kú** and **Orílẹ̀émèrè** took the advice seriously and failed to call on their fathers despite the fact that they passed by their fathers' homes on the way. But **Afùwàpẹ**, the son of **Ọ̀rúnmìlà**, insisted on seeing his father and thus left his two friends to continue on their journey while he stayed for a while with his father.

**Orísẹ̀ẹ̀kú** and **Orílẹ̀émèrè** finally reached **Àjàlá**'s house after a lot of problems on the way. But they did not find him at home. They therefore asked for the store-house of heads and each one made his own choice. Unfortunately, the heads they chose were useless ones with the result that when they arrived on earth, they worked hard but they did not achieve any good results.

When **Afùwàpẹ** left his two friends, he went into his father's house. His father performed divination for him and the **Ifá** priests who performed the divination asked his father to perform sacrifice with three small bags of salt and three times nine thousand cowries. The **Ifá** priests gave him part of the money and the salt to take with him on the journey. After travelling for a long time, **Afùwàpẹ** got to the house of a gate-keeper and he

asked for the way to Àjàlá's house but the gate-keeper insisted that he would first of all finish cooking his soup before he would show the way to Afùwàpé. While they were cooking the soup, he noticed that the gate-keeper was using ashes instead of salt to sweeten his soup. He therefore introduced salt to the gate-keeper who liked it so much that he told Afùwàpé the secret about Àjàlá which led to his choice of a good Orí.

The gate-keeper told Afùwàpé that Àjàlá was an incorrigible debtor and that he was always hiding in the ceiling of the house to avoid his creditors. He therefore advised Afùwàpé to pay off the debts owed by Àjàlá so that the latter could emerge from his hiding place and attend to him personally while choosing his Orí. When Afùwàpé got to Àjàlá's house, he paid off the creditors he met there and Àjàlá emerged from hiding. The result was that Afùwàpé chose a good Orí and when he got to the earth, he became a very prosperous person.

There are a number of important points in this story. First, we see the importance of sacrifice as a means of leading one aright all the time. It was the sacrifice of money and salt which Afùwàpé made in his father's house which led him to make the right choice of Orí in the house of Àjàlá. He introduced the salt to the gate-keeper who liked it so much that he told him what to do at Àjàlá's house. He used the money to pay off Àjàlá's creditors thus making it possible for that incorrigible fellow to choose the right type of Orí for him.

Secondly, we see the importance of salt as a ritual and civilizing commodity. The gate-keeper who did not know salt can be regarded as a symbol of ancient and primitive culture while Àjàlá's introduction of salt to him can be regarded as a powerful civilizing influence

for which the gate-keeper was so grateful. In the folklore of many cultures of the world, salt is usually regarded as a commodity with important ritual and commercial significance. In this particular story, it could be regarded as the commodity which one must have in order to have the secret and important knowledge which can affect the choice of one's destiny in life. In other words, salt is synonymous with good, orderly and civilized life while lack of it represents primitive and useless life. This is probably why salt is used during the christening ceremony of Yoruba children. Salt is synonymous with good, happy and sweet life.

Thirdly, this story clearly shows that once the choice of **Ori** has been made, one has made for oneself a final and irrevokable decision. The only thing that can affect this choice is hard work over a long period of time, the proceeds of which are fed into sacrifice. In other words, the person who has chosen a bad **Ori** in heaven cannot expect to make any progress in life until he has worked very hard and performed a lot of sacrifice with the proceeds of his hard work. But for the person who chose a good **Ori** there is no problem at all in achieving a good life. However, he too must work hard since **Ori** merely represents the potential to achieve success in life.

This extremely fatalistic outlook to life so characteristic of Yoruba belief is redeemed partially by the concept of sacrifice mentioned above. Nevertheless the Yoruba still cling tenaciously to the concept of **Ori** in explaining success or failure in life. It means therefore that, to a large extent, the individual is not entirely responsible for what he achieves or fails to achieve in life. Belief in **Ori** may be regarded as a sort of escapism but it certainly has far-reaching social and psychological consequences.



Èbìtì, ègbàkè ní yèdí pẹ́.  
 A díá fún Orísèṣékú, ọmọ Ògún;  
 A bù fún Orílèémèrè, ọmọ Ọja;  
 A díá fún Afùwàpẹ tí ọmọ Ọrúnmilà,

- 5 Níjọ tí wọn nírelé Olódùmarè lọ rée yanrí.  
 Àwọn mètẹ̀tẹ̀ta tí a dárúkọ wònyí, ọ̀rẹ̀ ní wọn.  
 Nígba tò ọ̀jọ̀ kan ní wọn bá gbìmọ̀ pọ̀ pé  
 Kí àwọn ó lọ sílé ayé,
- 10 Kí àwọn ọ̀ jọ máa gbébẹ̀;  
 Bọ́yá ibẹ̀ẹ̀ lè san àwọn ju ọ̀run lọ.  
 Ní wọn bá fi ọ̀rọ̀ náà lọ àwọn àgbàlagbà tò jù  
 wọn lọ.  
 Wọn ní bí wọn bá nìlọ sílé ayé,  
 Wọn ní látí kọ̀kọ̀ lọ sí ọ̀dọ̀ Àjàlá
- 15 Látí yan ipín nìbẹ̀.  
 Wọn ní “èèwò kan náà ní ẹ̀ ní látí sà o.  
 Bí ẹ̀ bá nìlọ;  
 Ẹ̀ kò gbọ̀dọ̀ yà sí ọ̀tún,  
 Bẹ̀ẹ̀ ní ẹ̀ kò gbọ̀dọ̀ yà sí ọ̀sì,
- 20 Ilé Àjàlá ní kí ẹ̀ máa lọ tààràtà.”  
 Wọn sọ fún wọn pé :  
 “Bí ẹ̀nikán bá gbúroo babaa rẹ̀ lònà,  
 Kò gbọ̀dọ̀ yabẹ̀ o.”  
 Wọn ní ilé Àjàlá ní kí wọn ọ̀ máa lọ tààrà.

It is the snare which strikes suddenly.

Ifá divination was performed for **Orí ẹ̀ẹ́kú**,<sup>1</sup> the son of **Ọ̀gún**;

Ifá divination was performed for **Orílẹ́mèrè**,<sup>2</sup> the son of **Ìja**;<sup>3</sup>

Ifá divination was performed for **Afùwàpé**,<sup>4</sup> the son of **Ọ̀rúnmìlà**;

- 5 On the day they were going to the abode of **Olódùmarè** to choose **Orí**.

These three people were all friends.

One day, they deliberated together,

And decided that they would go to the earth,

They decided that when they arrived on the earth,

- 10 They would settle down there,  
Hoping that the earth would be better for them than heaven.

They asked for advice from older people,

And they were told that before going to the earth,

They must first of all go to **Àjàlá**.<sup>5</sup>

- 15 To choose **Orí**.

They were warned thus, "You must observe one prohibition.

When you are going,

You must not turn to the right,

Neither must you turn to the left.

- 20 You must go straight to the house of **Àjàlá**."

They were warned thus,

"Even if one of you hears his father's voice on the way,

He must not go there."

They were told to go straight to the house of **Àjàlá**.

- 25 Wọn ní nígbà tí wọn bá yànpín tán lódò Àjàlá  
 Ní kí wọn ó tóó kọrí sóde ìsáláyé.  
 Wọn ní àwọn gbọ o.  
 Ní wọn bá múra,  
 Ó dilé Àjàlá, alámmò tíi mọrí.
- 30 Nígbà tí wọn rìn sàà,  
 Wọn kan Afabéré-gúnyán níbi tó gbé ngúnyán  
 pèlú okini.  
 Wọn ní ẹ òlẹ o, baba.  
 Ó ni, “hòò.”  
 Wọn ní, “ẹ jòò,
- 35 Ọdò Àjàlá làwọn nílọ.”  
 Afabéré-gúnyán ní àfi bí òún bá gúnyán òun tán  
 Ní òún tóó leè júwe ònà fún wọn.  
 Ní Afùwàpẹ bá gba abéré lówọọ rẹ,  
 Lọ bá níí gúnyán.
- 40 Ó gúnyán nàà fún odidi ọjọ mẹtá  
 Kí ó tóó gún un tán.  
 Nígbà tí ó gúnyán yíi tán,  
 Ní Afabéré-gúnyán wáá sọ fún wọn wí pé  
 Kí wọn ọ máa lọ.
- 45 Ó ní bí wọn bá rìn díẹ.  
 Kí wọn ọ yà sí apá ọtún.  
 Ó ní wọn ọ kan oníbodè kan mbẹ

- 25 They were told that it was after choosing **Orí** from  
**Àjàlá**  
That they would go to the earth.  
They promised to heed the warning.  
They got themselves ready,  
And started off on their journey to the house of  
**Àjàlá**, the potter who makes heads.
- 30 After walking for some distance,  
They got to **He-who-pounds-yams-with-a-needle**  
pounding yams with a small needle.  
They said, "Father, we greet you."  
The old man replied, "Thank you."  
They pleaded, "Please, Sir,
- 35 We are going to the house of **Àjàlá**."  
**He-who-pounds-yams-with-a-needle** said that he  
must first finish pounding his yams  
Before he showed them the way.  
**Afùwàpé** took the needle from him,  
And started to pound the yams with it.
- 40 He pounded the yams for three days  
Before he finished the job.  
When he finished pounding the yams,  
**He-who-pounds-yams-with-a-needle** told them that  
They were free to continue on their journey.
- 45 He told them that after travelling some distance,  
They should turn to the right.  
Where they would find a gate-keeper.

Kí wọn ó bèèrè lẹwọọ rẹ,  
Yóó sì júwe ọ̀nà fún wọn.

50 Nígbà tí wọn rìn sàà,  
Ní wọn bá dé ibikan.  
Ní Orísẹ̀ẹ́kú, ọ̀mọ Ọ̀gún, bá dúró sì.  
Ó bèrẹ̀ sí gbúròóo babaa rẹ,  
Bó tí ńmú apó,

55 Tó ńmú ọ̀fà,  
Tó ńmú ọ̀run.  
Orísẹ̀ẹ́kú, ọ̀mọ Ọ̀gún ní òun ó lọ  
Bá baba òun palẹ̀ ogun mọ́ o.  
Ní wọn bá rán an létí pé

60 Ẹ bí wọn tí ka èèwọ́ fún àwọn  
Pé àwọn ọ̀ gbọ́dọ̀ yà sí ibikan.  
Ní Orísẹ̀ẹ́kú, ọ̀mọ Ọ̀gún, bá síṣẹ̀,  
Ó ní kò burú.  
Ní wọn bá ńlọ.

65 Nígbà tí wọn rìn sàà,  
Ní wọn bá kan ilé Ọ̀rúnmilà.  
Wọn ńgbọ́ tí Ọ̀rúnmilà ńsẹ́pọ́n Ifá poro poro poro.  
Ní Afùwàpẹ́ bá dúró sì.  
Àwọn méjì yókù ní kí ó jẹ́ kí àwọn ọ̀ máa lọ.

- They should ask from that man,  
And he would show them the way.
- 50 After travelling some distance,  
They got to a certain place.  
**Orísẹ̀ẹ́kú**, the son of **Ògún**, stood still,  
When he heard his father's movement.  
He heard his father taking his quiver,
- 55 And taking his arrows,  
And taking his bow.  
**Orísẹ̀ẹ́kú**, the son of **Ògún**, then said that he would  
go  
To help his father prepare for war.  
But his comrades reminded him that
- 60 They had been warned  
Not to call anywhere on the way.  
Then, **Orísẹ̀ẹ́kú**, the son of **Ògún**, moved forward.  
He said that was alright,  
And they continued on their journey.
- 65 After travelling some distance,  
They came to the house of **Ọ̀rúnmìlà**.  
They heard **Ọ̀rúnmìlà** striking his divining board  
loudly with his **Ìróké**.<sup>6</sup>  
**Afùwàpẹ** then stood still.  
The other two urged him to let them go on,

70. Afùwàpẹ ní òun ò níí lọ mọ,  
 Àfi bí òún bá fojú kan baba òun.  
 Ni wọn bá rán an létí èèwọ tí wọn kà fún wọn.  
 Afùwàpẹ sá kọ jálẹ,  
 Ó ní òún fẹẹ fojú kan baba òun.
75. Lọ bá rá giiri wọlé.  
 Ni wọn bá ńlọ.  
 Nígbà tí Ọrúnmilà fojú kan Afùwàpẹ,  
 Ó bi í níbi tọ ńlọ.  
 Afùwàpẹ ní òún ńlọ sóde isálayé ni,  
 80. Òún sì ní látí kọ lọ yanrí lódọ Àjàlà.  
 Ni Ọrúnmilá bá kó Ifáa rẹ,  
 Ó fi kan Afùwàpẹ lóri.  
 Ẹgbà tí yóó da Ifá náà sílẹ,  
 Ogbèyónú (Ogbègúndá) ni wọn rí.
85. Nígbà tí àwọn babaláwo ilé Ọrúnmilà wo  
 Ifá náà suun,  
 Wọn ní, “Ìwọ Ọrúnmilà,  
 Ibikan ni ọmọ rẹ ńlọ yìi,  
 Kọmọ náà ó lè rí ipín rere mú níbẹ,  
 90. Ẹbọ ni kí ó ẹ.”  
 Kín ni àwọn ọ ha rú báyii?  
 Wọn ní kí wọn ó ní egbínrín iyọ mẹta,

70. But **Afùwàpé** said that he wouldn't go  
 Until he had seen his father.  
 They reminded him of the warning given them.  
 But **Afùwàpé** refused completely,  
 And insisted that he must see his father.
75. He then hurried into the house.  
 The two others left him,  
 And continued their journey.  
 When **Ọrúnmílà** saw **Afùwàpé**,  
 He asked him where he was going.
80. **Afùwàpé** said that he was going to the earth,  
 And he must first go to **Àjàlá** to choose **Orí**.  
**Ọrúnmílà** then took his divinatio ninstruments,  
 And with them he touched **Afùwàpé**'s head.  
 When he cast the instruments on the ground,
85. **Ogbèyónú**<sup>s</sup> (otherwise known as **Ogbègúndá**)  
 appeared.  
 When the priests of **Ọrúnmílà**'s household studied  
 it carefully,  
 They said, "You, **Ọrúnmílà**,  
 Your son is going on a journey to a certain place.  
 So that he may choose a good lot there,
90. Let him perform sacrifice".  
 When **Ọrúnmílà** asked what they would use for  
 sacrifice,  
 He was told to perform sacrifice with three bags of  
 salt.



Kó sì ní egbeęgbàafà ọ̀nà m̀eta.  
Ni Ọ̀rúnmílá bá kó gbogboo rẹ̀ kalẹ̀,

95 Ni wọn bá ẹ́fá fún Afùwàpẹ̀  
Wọn bu diẹ̀ fún un nínú iyò náà,  
Wọn sì fún un ní egbàafà nínú egbàaàsán tí ó rú.  
Ni wọn bá ní kí Afùwàpẹ̀ ọ̀ máa lọ.  
Nígba tí Afùwàpẹ̀ jáde nílẹ̀ Ọ̀rúnmílà,

100 Kò rí Orísẹ̀ẹ́kú, ọ̀mọ Ọ̀gún,  
Àti Orílẹ̀mèrè, ọ̀mọ Ẫja mọ.  
Wọn ti lọ ní ti wọn.  
Nígba tí àwọn méjì yí nílọ.  
Wọn kan oníbodè àkókọ,

105 Wọn bèèrè ilé Àjàlá lówọ̀ọ̀ rẹ̀.  
Oníbodèé ní ilé Àjàlá jìnnà síhìn.  
Ó ní bí kò bá jìnnà ní,  
Ọ̀un ibá fi hàn wọn.  
Ni wọn bá bínú kúrò lódòọ̀ rẹ̀,

110 Wọn bèèrè lódòọ̀ ẹ̀lòmíràn.  
Ni wọn bá délé Àjàlá.  
Nígba tí wọn délé Àjàlá,  
Wọn ọ̀ bá a nílẹ̀.  
Ni wọn bá jókòó dè é.

- And three times twelve thousand cowries.  
**Ọrúnmìlà** got all the materials ready,
- 95 And the sacrifice was performed for **Afùwàpẹ**.  
 Part of the salt  
 Together with twelve thousand cowries was given  
 to him.  
 They then asked **Afùwàpẹ** to proceed on his journey.  
 When **Afùwàpẹ** came out of **Ọrúnmìlà**'s house,
- 100 He saw neither **Orísẹ̀ékú**, the son of **Ọ̀gún**,  
 Nor **Orílẹ̀émèrè**, the son of **Ìja**.  
 They had gone.  
 When these two were going,  
 They got to the keeper of the first gate,
- 105 And asked for the house of **Àjàlá**.  
 But the gate-keeper said that **Àjàlá**'s house was  
 too far,  
 He said if it was not too far,  
 He would have taken them there.  
 They left him in anger,
- 110 And asked another person.  
 At last, they reached **Àjàlá**'s house.  
 When they got to the house of **Àjàlá**,  
 They did not find him at home.  
 They decided to sit down and wait for him.

- 115 Nígbà tó di ọjọ kejì tí Àjàlá ò dé,  
 Ní wọn bá wí fún àwọn ará ilée rẹ pé  
 Nìkan kan làwọn wáá ẹ.  
 Wọn ní àwọn wáá yanrí ní.  
 Ní àwọn ará ilé Àjàlá bá dáhùn pé
- 120 “Bó bá ẹ pé torí ní,  
 Orí m̀bẹ̀ ǹlẹ̀”  
 Ní wọn bá mú wọn lọ síbì tí Àjàlá mọ́rí sí,  
 Nígbà tí Orísẹ̀ẹ̀kú ọ̀ bọ̀ọ̀ síbẹ̀,  
 Orí tọ̀ jẹ̀ tuntun,
- 125 Tí Àjàlá ò tìì sun rárá ló mú.  
 Nígbà tí Orílẹ̀émèrè náà ọ̀ bọ̀ọ̀ síbẹ̀,  
 Orí ǹlá kan bá yí ló gbé  
 Láimọ̀ pé ọ̀ tí fọ̀ sára.  
 Ní àwọn méjèèjì bá gbé oríi wọn borí.
- 130 Ní wọn bá fọ̀n ọ̀n,  
 Ó di òde ayé.  
 Ó kù díẹ̀ kí wọn ọ̀ dóde ìsálayé,  
 Ní ọ̀jó ba dé.  
 Ọ̀jọ̀ yí rọ̀ títí,
- 135 Ọ̀ kọ̀, kọ̀ dá mọ̀,  
 Bẹ̀ẹ̀ ní ọ̀ ǹpa Orísẹ̀ẹ̀kú àti Orílẹ̀émèrè.  
 Nígbà tí ọ̀jó pa Orí yíi tó bẹ̀ẹ̀,

- 115 When, on the second day, **Àjàlá** did not return,  
They told the people of **Àjàlá's** household  
That they had come for a certain thing.  
They said that they had come to choose **Orí**.  
The people of **Àjàlá's** household answered thus,
- 120 "If that is your mission,  
Numerous heads are available."  
They then took them to **Àjàlá's** store-house of  
heads.  
When **Orisẹ́ékú** entered,  
He picked a newly-made head
- 125 Which **Àjàlá** had not fired at all.  
When **Orílèémèrè** also entered,  
He picked one very big head  
Not knowing that it had cracked.  
The two of them put on their clay heads,
- 130 And hurried off  
On their way to the earth.  
A little distance before they reached the earth,  
It started to rain.  
It rained for a long time,
- 135 And it refused to stop.  
Yet it was beating **Orisẹ́ékú** and **Orílèémèrè**.  
After the rain had beaten their heads for long,

Lọ bá bèrè sí mumi yó.  
Bí oríi wọn náà bá kẹ̀ yìin,

140 Ní ọ̀ bàá ri bọ̀ sílẹ̀ pọ̀,  
Orí sáà ñkẹ̀ yìin  
Títí tí ọ̀ fi bú légbẹ̀ẹ̀,  
Tó fi ri dànù,  
Tí gbogboo rẹ̀ẹ̀ wáá kù peḽẹ̀bẹ̀.

145 Ní wọn bá fi bèẹ̀ wọlé ayé.  
Nígbà tí wọn délé ayé tán,  
Wọn sìsẹ̀ sìsẹ̀,  
Wọn ò rẹ̀rẹ̀ jẹ.  
Bí wọn bá fi eépìni sọ̀wò,

150 Eépìni náà lè tún dá gbèsèè kọ̀ọ̀-kan-àbọ̀  
Sí wọn lẹ̀rùn.  
Nígbà tí wọn ẹ̀ kiní yìi títí,  
Fún bí ọ̀dún mẹ̀wáá,  
Tí wọn ò rí ojútùúu rẹ̀,

155 Ní wọn bá mééjì kẹ́ẹ̀ta,  
Wọn looko akònilọ̀gbọ̀n.  
Àwọn awòyeróye wáá fi yé wọn pé  
Orí tí wọn mú ni ò d́áa.  
Wọn ní, “Nígbà tí ẹ̀ m̀bọ̀,

- The heads became water-logged.  
As a result, the heads expanded,
- 140 And they started to drop off in bits.  
The heads expanded more and more,  
Until the sides were completely worn away,  
And started to drop off in lobes.  
So that what remained was flat and small.
- 145 It was in that state that they entered the earth.  
When they got to the earth,  
They worked and worked,  
But they had no gain.  
If they traded with one half-penny,
- 150 It might lead them  
To a loss of one-and-a-half-pennies.  
When they did this  
For about ten years  
Without any hope of improvement,
- 155 They added two cowry-shells to three,  
And went to consult Ifá priests.  
These wise men told them that  
The fault was in the bad heads they had chosen.  
They asked them, "When you were coming to the  
earth,

- 160 Ñjẹ òjọ pa yín lònà?”  
 Wọn ní, “Bẹẹ ni.”  
 Wọn ní, “Nígbà tí ẹ m̀bọ wá sílé ayé,  
 Orí burúkú lẹ gbé.  
 Bí orí náà kò bá ẹ tútù,
- 165 A ẹ èyí tó ti fọ sára.”  
 Wọn ní, “Bẹ ẹ ti m̀bọ lònà un,  
 Tójò n̄pa yín,  
 Ni Orí burúkú tẹ ẹ gbé n̄yìn̄rìn,  
 Tó n̄ri dànù.”
- 170 Wọn ní, “Nígbà tí ẹ ó fi délé ayé,  
 Orí tẹ ẹ gbé kò jù pẹlẹbẹ lọ mọ.  
 Látí ìgbà náà, gbogbo iṣẹ tí ẹ n̄ṣe,  
 Orí burúkú pẹlẹbẹ un lẹ fi n̄dí,  
 Ó sì di ìgbà tí ẹ bá kún un títí,
- 175 Tí ó bá dé déédéé èyí tí ẹ gbé kúrò lóde ọrun,  
 Kí ẹ tóó máa rí ẹ.”  
 Nígbà tí Afùwàpẹ m̀bọ,  
 Tó rìn sàà,  
 Ó kan oníbodè àkókọ.
- 180 Ó bi í léèrè ilé Àjàlá.  
 Eléyiun ní àfi bí òún bá se ọbẹ tí òun n̄sè tán.  
 Ni Afùwàpẹ bá jókòó tì í,

- 160 Were you beaten by rain ?”  
They answered “We were”.  
The Ifá priests said, “When you were coming to  
the earth,  
You chose bad heads.  
If they were not unbaked heads,
- 165 They must have been broken ones.  
As you were coming to the earth,  
And you were being beaten by rain,  
The bad heads you chose were wearing away,  
And dropping off in pieces.
- 170 Before you arrived on the earth,  
Your heads had become very flat.  
Since then all the gains from your work,  
Were being used to replenish the worn-off parts  
of your bad heads.  
And it is when you have replenished them suffi-  
ciently
- 175 So that they are restored to their original sizes,  
That you will begin to prosper very well.”  
When Afùwàpé was coming,  
He walked some distance,  
And got to the keeper of the first gate.
- 180 He asked from him the way to Àjàlá’s house.  
The gate keeper said that he would first finish  
cooking his soup.  
So, Afùwàpé sat patiently by him,



Ọ mbá a á koná.  
Ibi tí Afùwàpẹ tí nkoná

185 Ló tí rí i pé eérú nì oníbodè mbù sínú ọbẹ.  
Ó ní, “Baba, eérú lẹ mbù sọbẹ yí !”  
Babá nì ohun táwọ́n jẹ nì tàwọ́n nù un.  
Nì Afùwàpẹ bá mú ọkan nínú egbínrín iyọọ rẹ,  
Ó bu iyọ níbẹ,

190 Ó fí sínú ọbẹ.  
Ló bá nì kí oníbodè ọ tọ ọ wò.  
Nígbà tí oníbodè ó fí kan ẹnu,  
Ó ní níbo ló tí rí ohun tó dùn tó bá yí ?  
Ó ní ñjẹ o lẹ bun òun níbi ìyókù ?

195 Afùwàpẹ nì kò burú,  
Ló bá kó egbínrín iyọ méjèèjì fún un.  
Nígbà tí wọ́n se ọbẹ yí jíná,  
Nì oníbodè bá dídẹ,  
Ọ saájú,

200 Afùwàpẹ tẹ lẹ e.  
Wọ́n rìn tí tí,  
Wọ́n búrìn búrìn,  
Nì wọ́n bá sún mọ ilé Àjàlá.  
Nì wọ́n bá bèrẹ sí gbáriwo.

- Helping him to kindle the fire.  
 As **Afùwàpé** was helping to kindle the fire,
- 185 He noticed that the gate-keeper was putting ashes  
 into the soup.  
 He said, "Father, what you are putting into the  
 soup is ordinary ashes".  
 But the old man said that that was what he always  
 ate.  
**Afùwàpé** then took one of his bags of salt,  
 And took a little salt from it,
- 190 And put it into the soup.  
 He asked the gate-keeper to taste it.  
 When he tasted it,  
 He asked **Afùwàpé** whence he got such a thing.  
 He implored **Afùwàpé** to give him more of it.
- 195 The latter agreed,  
 And gave him the two bags of salt.  
 When they finished cooking the soup,  
 The gate-keeper stood up.  
 He led the way,
- 200 And **Afùwàpé** followed him.  
 They walked for long.  
 They walked and walked.  
 When they came close to Àjàlá's house,  
 They started to hear a loud noise.

- 205 Oníbodè ní, “Ilé Àjàlá ni wọn tí ńpariwo un.”  
 Ó ní, “Àjàlá ò sí ńlẹ̀ nù un,  
 Ó ti sá pamọ́ fún olówóo rẹ̀ nù un.  
 Olówó náà ní ńpariwo báun.”  
 Ó bi Afùwàpẹ́ bó bá ní owó lówọ́.
- 210 Afùwàpẹ́ ní bèẹ̀ ni.  
 Ó ní bí Afùwàpẹ́ bá fojú kan olówó Àjàlá náà,  
 Kí ó bá Àjàlá san owó tí ó jẹ́ ẹ̀.  
 Nígba tí Afùwàpẹ́ délé Àjàlá,  
 Ó bá ẹnì tí Àjàlá jẹ́ lówó náà
- 215 Tí ńkẹ́, tí ńyán bí ẹ̀şin.  
 Ni Afùwàpẹ́ bá bí í ní iye gbèsè náà.  
 Ó ní ẹgbàafà ni.  
 Ni Afùwàpẹ́ bá tọ̀wọ́ bàpò,  
 Ló bá san ń.
- 220 Nígba tí ó san owó náà tán,  
 Tí olówó náà lọ tán,  
 Ni Àjàlá bá bẹ̀ sílẹ̀ láti òkè àjà,  
 Tọ́ sá pamọ́ sí.  
 Ó kí Afùwàpẹ́,
- 225 Afùwàpẹ́ náà kí í.  
 Ó ní ńjẹ́ ọ́ bá ẹ̀ńìkan níhìn ?  
 Afùwàpẹ́ ní òun bá a,

- 205 The gate-keeper said, "That noise is from Àjàlá's house."  
 He said, "That shows that Àjàlá is not at home.  
 He is in hiding to avoid his creditor.  
 The creditor is the one making that noise".  
 He asked Afùwàpé if he had money on him,
- 210 And Afùwàpé said he had.  
 The gate-keeper said that if Afùwàpé saw the creditor,  
 He should help Àjàlá to pay up the debt.  
 When Afùwàpé arrived at Àjàlá's house,  
 He found the creditor,
- 215 Shouting, neighing like a horse.  
 Afùwàpé then asked him the amount of money involved.  
 The creditor said the amount was twelve thousand cowries.  
 Afùwàpé then opened his bag,  
 Brought out the money, and paid the debt.
- 220 After he had paid the money,  
 And the creditor had left,  
 Àjàlá jumped down from the ceiling  
 Where he had hidden himself.  
 He greeted Afùwàpé,
- 225 And Afùwàpé also greeted him.  
 He asked whether Afùwàpé found someone in the house,  
 And Afùwàpé said he found someone

Tọ sọ wí pé o jẹ̀ òun ní egbàafà.  
Afùwàpẹ ní sùgbọn òun tí san owó náà o.

230 Ní Àjàlá bá dúpẹ̀ lówọ̀ Afùwàpẹ.  
Ó bí i pé kín ló wáá ẹ.  
Afùwàpẹ ní òun wáá yanrí ní.  
Ní Àjàlá bá mú un,  
Ó ní kọ kálọ.

235 Nígba tí ọ yá,  
Wọn dé ibi tí Àjàlá mọ orí sí.  
Wọn bá ọkànlérúgba orí níbẹ.  
Ní Àjàlá bá ju ọpá irin sí ọkan,  
Níse ló bú pẹẹ.

240 Àjàlá ní, “O ò rí i,  
Èyiun ọ dǎa.”  
Ó tún rí èkejì,  
Ó ju ọpá irin sí i,  
Èyiun náàá tún bú pẹẹ.

245 Àjàlá ní èyiun náà ọ dǎa.  
Ní wọn bá tún ñkáàkiri  
Títí tí Àjàlá fi rí ọkan,  
Ó tún ju ọpá irin sí òun náà,  
Ó dún kangó kangó, koro koro.

- Who said that you (**Àjàlá**) owed him twelve thousand cowries.  
**Àfùwápé** said he had paid off the money.
- 230 **Àjàlá** then thanked **Afùwápé**,  
 And asked him what he wanted.  
**Àfùwápé** said that he had come to select an **Orí**.  
**Àjàlá** then took him,  
 And asked him to come along.
- 235 After some time,  
 They got to **Àjàlá**'s store-house of **Orí**.  
 They found two hundred-and-one<sup>10</sup> **Orí** there.  
**Àjàlá** threw his iron rod at one,  
 And that one broke into pieces.
- 240 **Àjàlá** said, "Don't you see ?  
 That one is not good".  
 He saw another one,  
 And threw his iron rod at it.  
 That one also broke into pieces.
- 245 **Àjàlá** said, "That also is not good".  
 So, they went on searching,  
 Until **Àjàlá** saw one,  
 And he threw his iron rod at that one as well.  
 It gave a loud and sonorous sound.

- 250    Ó tún gbé e,  
          Ó jù ú mọlẹ,  
          Ó yí gbiiri.  
          Lọ bá gbé e fún Afùwàpẹ.  
          Afùwàpẹ ní sẹ èyí lọ dǎa ?
- 255    Ajàlá ní bèẹ̀ nì.  
          Nì Afùwàpẹ bá gbé e karí.  
          Lọ bá kọrí sọ̀nà òde isálayé.  
          Ó kù diẹ̀ kó dóde isálayé nì òjó bá dé.  
          Òjò yí pọ̀ tó bèẹ̀ gẹ́ẹ̀,
- 260    Ó sì pa Afùwàpẹ etii rẹẹ̀ fẹ́rẹ́ẹ̀ di.  
          Bẹẹ̀ ní ntaá dànù.  
          Koro koro nì orí náàá yè nígbà tí ó délé ayé.  
          Nígbà tí Afùwàpẹ délé ayé tán,
- 265    Lọ bá bèrẹ̀ síí sẹ̀ ọ̀wò,  
          Ó sì níjẹ̀ ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀ èrè.  
          Ó níre ní ànító.  
          Ó kọ́lẹ̀, ó kààsẹ̀.  
          Ó ní ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀ aya,
- 270    Ó sì bímọ̀ lọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀ pẹ̀lú.  
          Kó bùsẹ̀ gàdà,  
          Kó bùsẹ̀ gèdẹ̀,  
          Nì wọ̀n bá fi joyè Orísanmí.

- 250 He then took it,  
And threw it on the bare ground,  
He gave it to Afùwàpé.  
Afùwàpé asked whether that was a good one.
- 255 Àjàlá said it was good.  
Afùwàpé then fixed it on the head,  
And started to go towards the earth.  
Just as he was about to get to the earth,  
it started to rain.  
The rain was very heavy,
- 260 And it beat Afùwàpé so much that he was almost  
deaf.  
As the rain was beating Afùwàpé's Orí,  
The rain particles were dropping off.  
The Orí was quite intact when he arrived on  
the earth.  
When Afùwàpé eventually got to the earth,
- 265 He started a trading business,  
And he made a lot of profit.  
He had enough of good things.  
He built a house, and furnished it with decorated  
doors.  
He had many wives,
- 270 And he had many children as well.  
After some time,  
And in due course,  
He was honoured with the title of Orísanmí. "



- Nígbà tí Orísẹ̀ẹ̀kú, ọmọ Ògún,
- 275 Àti Orílẹ̀émèrè, ọmọ Ìja, fojú kan Afùwàpẹ,  
Púrú ni wọn bú sẹkún:  
Wọn ní, “N ọ mọbi olórí gbé yanrí o,  
Mbá lẹ yan tèmi.  
N ọ mọbi Afùwàpẹ yanrí o,
- 280 Mbá lẹ yan tèmi.”  
Afùwàpẹ náàá sì dá wọn lóhùn wí pé :  
“Ọ ọ mọbi olórí gbé yanrí o,  
Ọ bá lẹ yan tẹ.  
Ọ ọ mọbi Afùwàpẹ yanrí o,
- 285 Ọ bá lẹ yan tẹ.  
Ibikan náà la ti gbé yanrí o,  
Kádàrá ọ papọ ní”.

- When **Orísẹ̀ẹ̀kú**, the son of **Ògún**,  
 275 And **Orílẹ̀émèrè**, the son of **Ìja**, saw **Afùwàpé**,  
 They burst into tears.  
 They said, “I don’t know where the lucky ones  
 chose their **Orí**,  
 I would have gone there to choose mine.  
 I don’t know where **Afùwàpé** chose his **Orí**,  
 280 I would have gone there to choose mine.”  
**Afùwàpé** answered and said,  
 “You don’t know where the lucky ones chose  
**Orí**,  
 You would have gone there to choose your own.  
 You don’t know where **Afùwàpé** chose his **Orí**,  
 285 You would have gone there to choose your own.  
 We chose our **Orí** from the same place,  
 But our destinies are different.”

## NOTES

1. **Orísẹ̀ẹ̀kú.** A personal name the meaning of which is obscure.
2. **Orílẹ̀émèrè.** Another personal name with obscure meaning.
3. **Ìja.** Name of a minor Yoruba god.
4. **Afùwàpẹ.** Another personal name.
5. **Àjàlá.** A common Yoruba personal name.
6. The loud noise mentioned here must have been produced by the hitting of **irókẹ** (carved ivory or wooden object of Ifá) on the divining board.
7. The Ifá divination instruments were used to touch Afùwàpẹ's head so as to communicate the wishes of his **Orí** to the Ifá instruments through which **Òrúnmìlà** acting as a spokesman of **Orí** would reveal the latter's wishes to the client.
8. **Ogbẹ̀yónú.** One of the minor two hundred and forty **Odù**. Its actual name is **Ogbẹ̀gúndá**, that is a combination of **Ogbè** on the right and **Ògúndá** on the left.
9. The ceiling of a traditional Yoruba building is made of mud spread over a wooden base. It is usually solid enough to hold most household implements which are kept there. It is also solid enough to hold a man repairing the roof or mending any part of the ceiling itself.
10. The number two hundred and one is commonly mentioned in Yoruba mythology. The number of gods in the Yoruba pantheon is variously put at two hundred and one or four hundred and one.
11. **Orísanmí.** A personal name or name of a title which means "Orí has rewarded me abundantly".

**vii. The Consequences of Marital Neglect  
Or How Àgbìgbò Bird Acquired the Pad  
on Its Head**

The following poem has at least two or three main themes. First, we see the consequences of neglect of sacrifice. When Òrúnmìlà was going to marry Òrò, the daughter of Olówu, he was told to perform sacrifice, but he procured only half of the materials prescribed for him as sacrifice. Since it is believed that neglect of sacrifice leads to evil consequences, one can therefore say that what happened to Òrúnmìlà later on was the result of his failure to fulfil the pronouncements of his Ifá priests about sacrifice.

Secondly, we see in the poem the consequences of marital neglect. Although, Òrúnmìlà's neglect of his wife for sixteen years was not deliberate, it was certainly responsible for his wife's unfaithfulness. Òrúnmìlà himself seemed to understand this very well and hence he did not punish or reject his wife because of her unfaithfulness. Òrúnmìlà's wife had had three children before he left for "the abode of Olókun" where, instead of the seventeen days he promised his wife, he spent sixteen years. In his absence, his wife, Òrò, became destitute and in desperation, she started going to the farmland with other women to fetch firewood for sale. It was on the way to the farm that she met one after the other, the three men responsible for her three pregnancies but who refused to claim their children or perform any fatherly duties whatsoever. Instead, they all warned her very sternly never to greet them again because they claimed that she had failed to reveal her identity as Òrúnmìlà's wife before they

cohabited with her. **Ọrọ** was therefore left to care for six children without any man to help her with this heavy responsibility.

At last, **Ọrúnmílà** arrived after sixteen years absence from home. He saw his three children and the three 'bastards'. But he did not say anything. He taught five of them (with the exception of **Ọbólẹbóḡgùn** who was a farmer) the secrets of Ifá divination. Later he sent them to distant places to go and perform divination. **Ọrúnmílà** seemed to realise that his wife's unfaithfulness was the result of his long absence from home. Therefore, he did not take any steps to punish her. But he wanted to test which one of the three boys would behave like a true 'bastard' so that he too might disown him. This was probably why he sent the children to distant places to perform divination.

In Yoruba traditional law, no child could be declared a bastard.<sup>1</sup> A child born as a result of the mother's unfaithfulness is either claimed by the mother's husband or returned to the man who was responsible for the mother's pregnancy. There is, however, the term '**ọmọ àlẹ**' which literally means "child of a concubine". This term could be used to describe any child, whether born to his mother's concubine or not, who failed in his filial obligation to his parents. It seemed that **Ọrúnmílà** merely wanted to test which one of these children would behave like a true '**ọmọ àlẹ**' by sending them to distant places to perform divination.

The filial responsibility of these children demanded that on their return from their divination tour, they should present to **Ọrúnmílà** all the money they made on their journey. **Ọrúnmílà** would then take a portion of the money and leave the greater portion for each of them. This was an important matter especially since

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1. Oloyede, E. O., "Legitimacy in Nigerian Law", Lagos Notes and Records, 3/2, (1972).

that would be the very first divination practice of these children after they had been initiated as Ifá priests.

On their return from their divination tour, all the children with the exception of **Àgbìgbò**, presented their gains to their father who took only one-tenth of the money. But **Àgbìgbò** buried his own money behind the city walls instead of presenting it to **Ọrúnmìlà**. This is where our third theme begins.

During their absence from home, **Ọrúnmìlà** used his Ifá divination incantations to kill the fathers of the three bastards. When the children arrived, he allowed them to go to their fathers' towns to perform funeral rites. When **Àgbìgbò** got to where he buried his twenty-thousand cowries, he dug it up and placed the money on his head. But **Èṣù** used his divine and vital power known as **àṣẹ** to turn the money into stone and it got stuck on **Àgbìgbò**'s head. Furthermore, **Èṣù** went to the city of **Ìkòfíṣíṣí**, the home of **Àgbìgbò**'s father, and warned the citizens of that city about the unpleasant consequences of letting **Àgbìgbò** enter into their town.

The result of the activities of **Èṣù** was that **Àgbìgbò** was turned away from his father's city and in shame and disgrace, he entered into the forest and became a bird carrying about the "load of evil" on his head. That "load of evil" is represented by the pad in the middle of that bird's head.

In Ifá divination poetry, the **Àgbìgbò** bird is usually regarded as a fake Ifá priest who deceives and cheats his own clients. Furthermore, he is believed to be in league with the evil supernatural powers known collectively as **ajogun** for the sole purpose of destroying man's handiwork. The **Àgbìgbò** bird is therefore the symbol of unfaithfulness in Ifá priests, a negation of the strict sanctions of the Ifá divination system.

Apá nlá nigì àjẹ,  
Oṣẹ a bìgi rẹrẹrẹ.  
A díá fún Ọrúnmilà,  
Ifá nlọ lẹé gbé Ọrọ,

- 5 Tíi ẹe ọmọ Olówu níyàwó.  
Wọn ní ó sákáa kí Mọlẹ.  
Ọ jàre,  
Ebo ní ó ẹe.  
Ó ní apábọrú èé kú,
- 10 Lọ bá rú ìdajì odidi ẹran  
Tí wọn ní ó fi rúbọ.  
Ni Ọrúnmilà bá múra,  
Ó gbé Ọrọ, ọmọ Olówu, níyàwó.  
Nijọ tí àwọn ẹgbé iyàwó ó tùú ká,
- 15 Tí ó yẹ kí Ọrúnmilá ó sùn tí obìnrin rẹ,  
Ni wọn bá ránńẹ wá látì òde Ọyán.  
Wọn ní òde Ọyán tí dàrú tán pátápátá báyii,  
Kí Ọrúnmilà ọ máa sáré bọ o.  
Ni Ọrúnmilá bá múra,
- 20 Ó kọrí sí òde Ọyán.  
Ó sì mú Ọrọ, obìnrin rẹ, lẹwọ lọ.  
Lálẹ ọjọ tí wọn dóde Ọyán,

- The mighty **apá** is the tree of witches.<sup>1</sup>  
**Oṣè** always has a mighty shade.<sup>2</sup>  
**Ifá** divination was performed for **Ọ́rúnmílà**  
 When he was going to marry **Ọ́rò**,<sup>3</sup>
- 5 The daughter of **Olówu**,<sup>4</sup> as a wife.  
 He was told to take care of **Mọlẹ**.  
 He was told that it would be a good thing  
 If he performed sacrifice.  
 But he said that those who offer a fraction of the  
 prescribed sacrifice do not necessarily die for  
 doing so.<sup>5</sup>
- 10 He therefore offered half of the animal  
 Prescribed for him as sacrifice.  
**Ọ́rúnmílà** then got himself prepared,  
 And married **Ọ́rò**, the daughter of **Olówu**.  
 On the day that the bride's maids would disperse,<sup>6</sup>
- 15 When **Ọ́rúnmílà** should have slept with his wife,  
 He got a message from the city of **Ọ́yán**<sup>7</sup>  
 That that city was in confusion,  
 And that he should hasten there.  
**Ọ́rúnmílà** got himself ready,
- 20 And went to the city of **Ọ́yán**.  
 And he took **Ọ́rò**, his wife, along with him.  
 On the night of the day they arrived at **Ọ́yán**,



Ọrúnmilà sùn ti obìnrin rẹ,  
Obìnrin náàá sì lóyún.

- 25 Kí ó tóó di wí pé wọn kúrò lóde Ọyán,  
Obìnrin Ọrúnmilá ti bímọ.  
Ọrúnmilá ní kí wọn ọ sọ ọ ní AmúkanlódéỌyán,  
Láìpẹ, wọn kúrò lóde Ọyán.
- 30 Ìgbà tí Ọrọ wo ọmọ náà wọn,  
Njẹ kí Ọrúnmilá ó tún sún tọ ọ,  
Ní wọn bá tún ránńsẹ pe Ọrúnmilà lóde Òhàkò.  
Ibẹ ni Ọrọ sì tún bí ọmọọ rẹ kejì sí.  
Wọn ní orúkọ wo ni àwọn ó sọ ọmọ náà ?
- 35 Ọrúnmilá ní kí wọn ó sọ ọ ní Amósùnlòhàkòdègi.  
Ìgbà tí Ọrọ wo ọmọ náà wọn tán,  
Ní wọn bá tún ránńsẹ pe Ọrúnmilà lótuu 'Fẹ.  
Ìgbà tí wọn dé ọhún tán,  
Ọrọ tún lóyún,
- 40 Ó sì tún bímọ.  
Wọn ní orúkọ wo ni àwọn ó sọ ọmọ náà ?  
Ọrúnmilá ní kí wọn ó sọ ọ ní Ọbọlẹbọdògùn,  
Òun ló sẹ iran àgbẹ sílẹ.  
Ọkúnrin ni gbogbo àwọn ọmọ mètẹ̀ẹ̀ta wònyí.

- Ọrúnmilà** slept with his wife,  
 And she became pregnant.
- 25 Before they left the city of **Ọyán**,  
**Ọrúnmilà**'s wife delivered.  
 They asked from **Ọrúnmilà** what the name of the  
 child should be.  
 And he told them to name him **AmúkanlódeỌyán<sup>8</sup>**.  
 Before long, they left the city of **Ọyán**.
- 30 When **Ọrọ** finished nursing the baby,  
 And as **Ọrúnmilà** wanted to cohabit with her again,  
 They sent for him in the city of **Ọ̀nkò**.<sup>9</sup>  
 It was in that place that she had her second child.  
 They asked from **Ọrúnmilà** what name to give to  
 the child,
- 35 And he told them to call him **Amósùnlónkòdẹgi<sup>10</sup>**.  
 When **Ọrọ** finished nursing the child,  
 They sent for **Ọrúnmilà** in the city of **Ifẹ**.  
 When they arrived there,  
**Ọrọ** became pregnant again,
- 40 And she delivered another child.  
 They asked again what name to give to the child.  
 And **Ọrúnmilà** said that he should be called  
**Ọbọlẹbọdọgùn**.<sup>11</sup>  
 He became the fore-father of all farmers.  
 All the three children were boys.

- 45 Nígbà tí wọn wo Ọ̀bọ̀lẹ̀bọ̀gùn wọn tán,  
 Ni wọn bá tún ránńsẹ́ sí Ọ̀rúnmilà nílẹ̀ Olókun.  
 Ẫgbà tí Ọ̀rúnmilá ńlọ,  
 Kò mú Ọ̀rọ̀, obìnrin rẹ̀, lọ.  
 Ó ní ọ̀jọ̀ kẹ̀tádínlógún ní òun ó padà dé,
- 50 Ó fún Ọ̀rọ̀ ní ọ̀kẹ̀ mẹ̀rìndínlógún,  
 Ó fún un ní aṣọ̀,  
 Ó sì fún un ní ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀ onjẹ.  
 Nígbà tí ó di oṣù kẹ̀ta,  
 Tí Ọ̀rúnmilá kọ̀,
- 55 Tí kò dé mọ̀,  
 Owó àti onjẹ tán lẹ̀wọ̀ Ọ̀rọ̀,  
 Bẹ̀ẹ̀ ní Ọ̀rọ̀ kò sì fọ̀wọ̀ kan isẹ̀ kan rí.  
 Ọ̀rọ̀ tí ó ti rí rọ̀dòrọ̀dọ̀ tẹ̀lẹ̀ rí,  
 Tí fún ṣooro.
- 60 Ẫgbà tí ebi ọ̀ jẹ́ kí ọ̀ gbádùn mọ̀,  
 Ni àwọn obìnrin egbẹ̀ẹ̀ rẹ̀ẹ̀ bá ní kó kálọ̀ sí oko igi.  
 Ọ̀jọ̀ tí wọn kọ̀ lọ̀ sí oko igi,  
 Ni Ọ̀rọ̀ bá pàdé Ońdàáró.  
 Ni wọn bá jọ̀ dá àlẹ̀.
- 65 Ońdàáró fún un ní ọ̀kẹ̀ márùún.  
 Ọ̀ bá a lẹ̀ pọ̀,  
 Ó sì lóyún.

- 45 After they had finished nursing **Ọbọlẹbọdùn**,  
 They sent for **Ọrúnmílà** in the abode of **Olókun**.<sup>12</sup>  
 When **Ọrúnmílà** was going,  
 He did not take **Ọrọ**, his wife, along.  
 He promised to return on the seventeenth day.
- 50 He gave sixteen **ọkẹ** measures of cowries<sup>13</sup> to **Ọrọ**.  
 He also gave her clothes,  
 And plenty of food.  
 In the third month  
 That **Ọrúnmílà** had stayed away,
- 55 And did not return home,  
**Ọrọ**'s store of money and food became exhausted,  
 And she had never done any wage-earning work  
 before.  
**Ọrọ** who was very plump and fleshy,  
 Became thin and emaciated.
- 60 When she suffered a lot of hunger,  
 Her friends advised her to go with them to fetch  
 firewood in the farm.  
 On the first day that she went to fetch firewood,  
 She met a man named **Ọndàáró**.<sup>14</sup>  
 They agreed to be concubines.
- 65 **Ọndàáró** gave her five **ọkẹ** measures of cowries.  
 He cohabited with her,  
 And she became pregnant.

- Ìgbà tí ọ sọ fún Onídàáró pé òun lóyún,  
Onídàáró ní kí ó mọ kí òun mọ ọ.
- 70 Ó ní àṣẹ obìnrin Ọrúnmilà ní,  
Ní kò tí wí fún òun.  
Tìṣẹ̀tìyà ní Ọrọ̀ tún fi bí ọmọ náà.  
Ìgbà tí yóó tùún bí,  
Ó bí ọmọkùnrin.
- 75 Ó sì sọ orúkọọ rẹ ní Agbe.  
Ìgbà tó tún wo ọmọ náà wọn tán,  
Tọ ná owó ọwọọ rẹ tán,  
Ló bá tún múbá wọn lọ sí oko igi.  
Lóko igi náà ló tún ti pàdé Onígòòsùn.
- 80 Ìgbà tí wọn jọ sọrọ tán,  
Onígòòsùn fún un ní ọkẹ mẹwàá,  
Ó sì bá a lò pọ.  
Oyún ló tún fi ní.  
Nígbà tí ó lóyún tán,
- 85 Onígòòsùn ní, “Ta ha ní ọkọọ rẹ?”  
Ọrọ̀ ní, “Ọrúnmilà ní.”  
Onígòòsùn náàá ní òun ò mọ pé obìnrin Ọrúnmilà  
ní.  
Ó ní kí ó mọ kí òun mọ láéláé.  
Ó kílọ̀ fún Ọrọ̀ pé
- 90 Kí ó má ṣe jẹ kí Ọrúnmilà ọ mọ ọ.  
Tlẹ̀pọ̀njútẹ̀pọ̀njú ní Ọrọ̀ tún fi bí ọmọ náà.

- But when she told **Oñdàáró** that she was pregnant,  
**Oñdàáró** warned her not to greet him again.
- 70 He said that she knew she was **Ọrúnmilà**'s wife  
 But did not tell him all along.  
 She went through great misery and suffering until  
 she delivered the baby.  
 When she delivered the child,  
 It was again a baby boy,
- 75 And she named him **Abge**.<sup>15</sup>  
 After she finished nursing the child,  
 And she finished spending her money,  
 She started to go with her friends again to fetch  
 fire-wood.  
 It was there again that she met **Oñgòósùn**.<sup>16</sup>
- 80 After they had talked together,  
**Oñgòósùn** gave her ten **òkẹ** measures of cowries,  
 And cohabited with her,  
 And, again, she became pregnant.  
 When she became pregnant,
- 85 **Oñgòósùn** asked, "Who, by the way, is your  
 husband?"  
**Ọrọ** replied, "His name is **Ọrúnmilà**".  
**Oñgòósùn** also said that he did not know that she  
 was the wife of **Ọrúnmilà**.  
 He also told her not to greet him any more.  
 He warned **Ọrọ** sternly
- 90 Not to greet him again.  
 It was with great hardship that **Ọrọ** delivered the  
 child,

Ó sì sọ orúkọọ rẹ ní Àlùkò.  
Lálápé, ó wo ọmọ náà wọn,  
Lọ bá tún bèrẹ síí bá wọn looko igi.

95 Pẹkí ló tún padé Olúùkòóló.  
Olúùkòóló ni, “Ta ló lobinrin tọ dára tó báylí?”  
Kò sẹsẹ tún fẹnu potobo mọ,  
Ogún ọkẹ lọ dà le e lówọ.  
Ìgbà tí wọn jọ seré tán,

100 Ọrọ tún lóyún.  
Ó wí fún Olúùkòóló pé  
Eré tí àwọn jọ sẹ doyún o.  
Olúùkòóló ní, “Ta ni ọkọọ rẹ?”  
Ó ní, “Ọrúnmílà ni.”

105 Púrú ni Olúùkòóló bú sẹkún.  
Ó ní òun ò tó ọ ọ fẹ o.  
Ó ní kí Ọrọ ó mọ kẹ òun mọ láéláé.  
Tìnratìnira ni Ọrọ tún fi bí ọmọ náà.  
Ó sì sọ ọmọ náà ní Àgbìgbò.

110 Àwọn ọmọ Ọrọ wáá di mẹfà.  
Ọkúnrin ni gbogbo àwọn ọmọ náà.  
Nínú àwọn ọmọ náà,  
Mẹtaá jẹ ọmọ-àlẹ,  
Mẹtaá sì jẹ ọmọ-ọkọ.

**And she named him Àlùkò.<sup>17</sup>**

**Before long, she finished nursing the child.**

**She started again to go with her friends to fetch firewood.**

**95 She again met a man named Olúùkòḡlḡ.<sup>18</sup>**

**Olúùkòḡlḡ asked, "Who is the owner of such a beautiful lady?"**

**He did not waste his time making a long speech,**

**He gave her twenty ḡké measures of cowries.**

**After they had fun with each other,**

**100 Òrḡ became pregnant again.**

**She told Olúùkòḡlḡ that**

**The fun which they had with each other had resulted in pregnancy.**

**Olúùkòḡlḡ asked her, "Who is your husband?"**

**She said, "He is called Òrúnmílà".**

**105 Olúùkòḡlḡ burst into tears immediately.**

**He said that he was too small to marry her,**

**And warned her not to greet him any more.**

**It was through great hardship that Òrḡ again had the baby,**

**And she named the child Àgbìgbò.<sup>19</sup>**

**110 The children of Òrḡ thus became six,**

**And they were all boys.**

**Out of the six children,**

**Three were children of concubines,**

**And the remaining three were her husband's.**



- 115 Ọdún kẹrindínlógún ni Ọrúnmilá tóó dé  
 Láti ilé Olókun.  
 Nígba tí ó dé,  
 Ọ bá àwọn ọmọọ tiẹ mètẹ̀ẹ̀ta,  
 Ó sì bá àwọn ọmọ-àlẹ̀ mètẹ̀ẹ̀ta náà.
- 120 Kọ̀ fọ̀hùn.  
 Kò mí.  
 Kò gbin.  
 Ọ̀ sá fọ̀wọ̀ lẹ̀rán,  
 Ó sì n̄wòran.'
- 125 Ó mú márùún nínú àwọn ọmọ mètẹ̀ẹ̀fà náà,  
 Ọ̀ kọ̀ wọn ni dídá-ọ̀wọ̀,  
 Wọn mò ọ̀n dá;  
 Ọ̀ kọ̀ wọn létítẹ̀-alẹ̀,  
 Wọn mò ọ̀n tẹ̀;
- 130 Ọ̀ kọ̀ wọn ní ọ̀karara-ẹ̀bọ̀,  
 Wọn mò ọ̀n ha.  
 Ó ní kí àwọn ọmọ-àlẹ̀ mètẹ̀ẹ̀ta ó sáwo lọ.  
 Kí àwọn ọmọ-àlẹ̀ mètẹ̀ta tí ó sáwo lọ náà ó tóó dé,  
 Ọ̀rúnmilá da iyẹ̀ròsùn,
- 135 Ó sáfá sí àwọn babaa wọn,  
 Ó sì pa wọn.  
 Ọ̀ sa Ifá sí Ońdàáró,

- 115 **Ọrúnmìlà** arrived in the sixteenth year  
 From his journey to the abode of **Olókun**.  
 When he arrived,  
 He found his three children,  
 And the other three children of his wife's concubines.
- 120 He did not say anything.  
 He neither breathed in anger  
 Nor moaned in pain.  
 He placed his hands on his cheeks,  
 And looked on in silence.
- 125 He took five of the six children,  
 And taught them the art of divination with the  
 divining chain,  
 Until they knew how to perform divination with it.  
 He taught them how to perform divination with  
 the sacred palm-nuts  
 Until they mastered how to divine with that instrument.
- 130 He taught them how to perform sacrifice,  
 And they mastered how to perform sacrifice.  
 He asked the three bastards to go on a divination  
 trip.<sup>20</sup>  
 Before they came back,  
**Ọrúnmìlà** made use of **ìyèròṣùn**,<sup>21</sup>
- 135 And recited **Ifá** incantations<sup>22</sup> against their fathers,  
 And killed them.  
 He recited **Ifá** incantations against **Ońdààró** ;

- Ọ pa á.  
 Ọ safá sí Onígòósùn,  
 140 Ọ pa á.  
 Ọ safá sí Olúùkòdọlọ,  
 Ọ pa òun náà.  
 Ìgbà tí ọ pa àwọn mètẹ̀ẹ̀ta tán,  
 Ọ wáá ránńsẹ́ sí àwọn ọmọ-àlẹ̀ mètẹ̀ẹ̀ta náà,  
 145 Ó ní baba wọn ti kú o,  
 Kí wọn ọ wáá sin òkú o.  
 Ìgbà tí àwọn ọmọ mètẹ̀ẹ̀ta náà m̀bẹ̀,  
 Èrù ẹgbẹ̀ẹgbààwá ni ẹnìkòọkan wọn jẹ̀ ẹ̀bọ̀ wálẹ̀.  
 Ìgbà tí Agbé dé,  
 150 Ó fi ẹgbàààwáa tirẹ̀ jísẹ̀.  
 Ọ̀rúnmilá mú ẹgbàá m̀bẹ̀,  
 Ó ní kí ọ máa kó ẹgbààsán yòókù lọ.  
 Àlùkò náàa fi ẹgbàààwá jísẹ̀.  
 Ọ̀rúnmilá mú ẹgbàá m̀bẹ̀,  
 155 Ó ní kí òun náà ọ maá mú ẹgbàá lọ.  
 Ìgbà tí Àgbìgbó dé bodè,  
 Ó rí ẹgbàààwáa tiẹ̀ mọ̀lẹ̀.  
 Ìgbà tó délé,  
 Ọ sọ fún Ọ̀rúnmilà pé òun ò rérù jẹ̀.

He killed him.

He recited Ifá incantations against **Ońgòósùn**,

140 He killed him.

He recited Ifá incantations against **Olúkòfíḽ**,  
And he killed him also.

After he had killed the three of them,  
He sent for the three bastards,

145 And told them that their fathers had died,  
And that they should come home and bury their  
fathers.

When the three children were coming home,  
Each one brought twenty thousand cowries home.  
When Agbe arrived,

150 He put down his twenty thousand cowries.

**Ọ́rúnmílà** took two thousand cowries out of the  
money,

And told him to take away the remaining eighteen  
thousand cowries.

**Àlúkò** also put down his gain of twenty thousand  
cowries.

**Ọ́rúnmílà** took two thousand cowries out of the  
money,

155 And told him to take away the remaining eighteen  
thousand.

But when **Àgbígbò** got to the town gate,<sup>23</sup>  
He buried his own gain of twenty thousand  
cowries.

When he arrived at home,

He told **Ọ́rúnmílà** that he made no gain at all.

- 160 Ọrúnmilà ọ fọhùn.  
 Ọrúnmilà wáá fún àwọn ọmọ mètẹ̀ẹ̀ta náà láyè  
 Pé kí wọn ọ lọ sìnkú babaa wọn.  
 Ni wọn bá kọrí sí ilúu babaa wọn.  
 Nígba tí Àgbìgbò dé bodè,
- 165 Ó hù ẹgbàaàwá tí ó rì mọ̀lẹ̀,  
 Ó gbé e karí,  
 Ọ kọrí sí Ìkọ̀fọ̀lọ̀,  
 Ilúu babaa rẹ̀.  
 Èsú ló di àgbó.
- 170 Mo ló di àfàkàn,  
 Ọkuuru ọpọ̀n ọnàá sún.  
 Ó ní ta ló rú,  
 Ta ni ò rú ?  
 Wọn ní Àgbìgbò nìkan ni ò rúbọ.
- 175 Bí Àgbìgbó ti gbé ẹgbàaàwá náà karí tán,  
 Ni Èsú bá na àdó àsúbi sí i.  
 Ni ẹrù owó náàá bá tìrán mọ ọn lórí,  
 Ó sì di ọta síbẹ̀.  
 Ni Èsú bá di atégùn,
- 180 Ó gbéra, ọ kọrí sí ilú Ìkọ̀fọ̀lọ̀.  
 Nígba tí ó dé Ìkọ̀fọ̀lọ̀,  
 Ó ní ẹyin ará òde Ìkọ̀fọ̀lọ̀,

- 160 **Ọrúnmìlà** did not say anything.  
 He permitted the three children  
 To go and bury their dead fathers:  
 They therefore went each to his father's city.  
 When **Àgbìgbò** arrived at the city gate,
- 165 He dug out the twenty thousand cowries which  
 he buried there,  
 Placed it on the head,  
 And went towards **Ìkòfíló**,  
 His father's city.  
**Èṣù** <sup>24</sup> said, "àgbó."<sup>25</sup>
- 170 To which I replied, "àfàkàn."<sup>26</sup>  
 I added that the carved wooden receptacle of  
 sacrifice was already on the move.<sup>27</sup>  
**Èṣù** asked, "Who performed sacrifice?  
 And who did not?"  
 To which people replied, "Only **Àgbìgbò** did not  
 perform sacrifice."
- 175 As soon as **Àgbìgbò** placed the twenty thousand  
 cowries on the head,  
**Èṣù** pointed his small medicine gourd<sup>28</sup> at him,  
 And the load of money got stuck to his head,  
 And became a piece of iron.  
**Èṣù** then turned himself into wind,<sup>29</sup>
- 180 And dashed across to the city of **Ìkòfíló**.  
 When he arrived at **Ìkòfíló**,  
 He said, "You, people of **Ìkòfíló**,

- Etíí yín mélòó ?  
 Ó ní ọmọọ yín kan m̀bẹ
- 185 Tí ó ti lọ ẹ̀yìn-odi,  
 Ó sì ńpadàá bọ wálé báýíí,  
 Bẹ̀ẹ̀ ní ẹ̀rù tó rù lórí,  
 Ẹ̀rù ibi ní.  
 Ẹ má ẹ se jẹ kí ọ sọ ọ kalẹ o.
- 190 Bí ọ bá sọ ọ kalẹ,  
 Ilée yín wòó,  
 Ọ̀nàa yín wòó.  
 Ní àwọn ará ọ̀de ìkọ̀fọ̀lọ bá ẹ́a araa wọn jọ,  
 Wọn múra,
- 195 Wọn dèná de Àgbìgbò.  
 Bí Àgbìgbó ti yọ ní ọ̀kánkán,  
 Àwọn ará ọ̀de Ìkọ̀fọ̀lọ fariwo ta.  
 Wọn ńwí pé :  
 “Ìkú lo gbé delẹ̀ yí o,
- 200 Àwa ọ̀ rà.  
 Àgbìgbò-ńìwọnrà̀n gbẹ̀rù ẹ o,  
 Gbẹ̀rù ẹ,  
 Àwa ọ̀ rà.  
 Àrùn lo gbé delẹ̀ yí o,

- How many ears has each one of you ?<sup>30</sup>  
 There is a son of yours
- 185 Who has been abroad,  
 And who is now coming back home.  
 But the load he is carrying on the head,  
 Is a load of evil.  
 You should not allow him to place it down.
- 190 If you allow him to do so,  
 Your homes would be smashed,  
 Your ways would be smashed.”  
 The people of **Ìkòṣíṣí** therefore gathered  
 themselves together,  
 They got themselves well prepared,
- 195 And blocked the road of **Àgbìgbò**.  
 As soon as **Àgbìgbò** appeared from afar off,  
 The people of **Ìkòṣíṣí** started to shout.  
 They were saying :  
 “It is death that you are carrying into this land.
- 200 We will not share in it.  
**Àgbìgbò-nìwọ̀nràn**<sup>31</sup> take away your load.  
 Take away your evil load.  
 We will not share in it.  
 It is disease which you are bringing into this city.



- 205    Àwa ọ rà.  
          Àgbìgbò-nìwọnràn gbẹrù ẹ o,  
          Gbẹrù ẹ,  
          Àwa ọ rà.  
          Ọfò lo gbé delẹ yí o,  
          Àwa ọ rà.
- 210    Àgbìgbò-nìwọnràn gbẹrù ẹ o,  
          Gbẹrù ẹ,  
          Àwa ọ rà.  
          Ìjàmbá lo gbé delẹ yí o,
- 215    Àwa ọ-rà.  
          Àgbìgbò-nìwọnràn gbẹrù ẹ o,  
          Gbẹrù ẹ,  
          Àwa ọ rà.  
          Àgbìgbò-nìwọnràn gbẹrù ẹ o,
- 220    Gbẹrù ẹ,  
          Àwa ọ ra.

- 205 We will not share in it.  
**Àgbìgbò-nìwọ̀nràn** take away your load,  
Take away your evil load,  
We will not share in it.  
It is loss which you are bringing into this city.
- 210 We will not share in it.  
**Àgbìgbò-nìwọ̀nràn** take away your load.  
Take away your load,  
We will not share in it.
- 215 It is danger which you are bringing into this city.  
We will not share in it.  
**Àgbìgbò-nìwọ̀nràn** take away your load.  
Take away your evil load.  
We will not share in it.
- 220 **Àgbìgbò-nìwọ̀nràn** take away your evil load,  
We will not share in it.

## NOTES

1. "The mighty **apá** is the tree of witches". **Apá** is a tall and huge hard-wood of the tropical rain forest and savanna region. It is believed by the Yoruba to be a tree sacred to witches and wizards.
2. "**Oṣè** always has a mighty shade". **Oṣè** is the baobab tree. It is one of the biggest savannaland trees and, as a big tree, it can be expected that it will have a mighty shade.
3. **Ọrọ**. Name of a person. This name in another context also means "fairy".
4. **Olówu**. The king of **Ọwu**, one of the most ancient and most famous Yoruba kingdoms. The capital of this ancient kingdom collapsed in the nineteenth century during the Yoruba civil wars and most of its inhabitants moved to **Abẹ̀ókúta** and other parts of Yorubaland.
5. This line refers to the fact that it is not compulsory for one to offer all the materials prescribed for one as sacrifice if one does not have the means to offer all of them. One can always offer a portion of every prescribed sacrifice and this does not necessarily offend the gods.
6. In traditional Yoruba society, a newly wedded wife is usually accompanied to her matrimonial home by a number of maidens who stay with her for several days (in some cases seven or nine days) before they disperse. These bride's maids are usually drawn from among the friends of the bride so that their presence does not make the bride feel the strain of separation from her friends and family during those first few days of her marital experience. In some cases, the bride sleeps

among these maids and she is not allowed to sleep with her husband until after their departure.

7. **Ọyán.** Name of a town near **Ọsogbo.**
8. **Amúkanlódé Ọyán.** Personal name meaning, "We have taken this one from the city of **Ọyán.**"
9. **Òhàkò.** Name of a place. This name also refers to a subdialect of the **Ọyó** dialect spoken by the people in the northern bank of the **Ọògùn** river.
10. **Amòsùn lónkò ègi.** This is a personal name which literally means "He who handles **Ọsùn** staff in the forest of **Òhàkò.** **Ọsùn** here refers to a minor Yoruba god worshipped by Ifá priests and whose most important symbol is a staff called by the same name which must not, according to the belief of Ifá priests, be allowed to fall down flat on the ground.
11. **Ọbọlẹbọògùn.** A personal name which literally means "He who feeds the earth as well as medicine".
12. **Olókun.** The Yoruba goddess of the sea. The expression "abode of **Olókun**" refers in a literal sense to the sea but in a figurative sense in which it is used here to heaven.
13. One **ọkẹ** measure of cowries contains twenty thousand cowries, the rough equivalent of modern Nigerian five shillings.
14. **Ọndàárò.** This name is actually a title meaning "The king of **Ìdáró.**
15. **Agbe.** A personal name which is here synonymous with the Yoruba name for the blue touraco, a bird frequently mentioned in Ifá divination poetry.
16. **Ọngòòsùn.** This name is also the title of the king of **Ìgòsùn,** a small town in northern Yorubaland.
17. **Àlùkò.** This is a personal name here but the name also refers to a bird frequently mentioned in Ifá divination poetry.

18. **Olúùkòóló**. This is the title of the king of the town named **Ìkòóló**.
19. **Àgbìgbò**. Here a personal name but it is also the name of a bird with a big head and a heavy pad in the middle of the head. This bird in Ifá divination poetry is regarded as an unfaithful Ifá priest. He is also the symbol of death and evil.
20. Some Ifá priests go on divination tours staying in whatever places they can find clients.
21. **Ìyẹ̀ròsùn**. The yellow powder of divination on which Ifá divination marks are printed during the process of divination. For more details see introduction pages 16 — 17.
22. “Ifá incantations”. These are special chants believed to have mysterious and magical effects. These special chants could be used for good or evil.
23. In traditional culture, most big Yoruba cities had city walls surrounded by deep moats. The wall is opened up in several places by city gates manned by the gate-keepers who performed the duties of a soldier, a revenue collector and a policeman. The number of gates which a city has depends largely on its size and the volume of economic, political and social activities carried on both within and without it.
24. **Èṣù**. The Yoruba trickster god who acts sometimes as spokesman for **Ọ̀rúnmìlà** and who keeps the divine and highly potent power known as **àṣẹ** belonging to **Olódùmarè** (the Almighty God) and with which the gods perform their superhuman deeds. Every god who wants to make use of this power has to borrow it from **Èṣù**. **Èṣù** is also the receiver of all sacrifices offered to the gods. He therefore punishes a man who refuses to perform sacrifice and rewards

he who performs sacrifice with his blessing of protection.

25. **“Àgbó”**. This word is part of a coded message which Èṣù sends to his disciples whenever he is ready to go and receive sacrifice from anyone who is ready to offer it or to punish he who does not want to perform sacrifice. The word means “it is time for us to move”.
26. **“Àfàkàn”**. This is another word forming part of Èṣù’s coded message to his disciples, and it means “to whom are we moving?”
27. **“The carved bowl of sacrifice is already on the move”**. This is also part of the coded message of Èṣù and it refers to the carved bowl with which Èṣù receives sacrifice.
28. The small medicine gourd of Èṣù referred to here is believed to be an instrument with which he can accomplish any evil deed especially whenever he wants to punish a person who refuses to perform sacrifice.
29. Èṣù is believed to have the power to turn himself into wind whenever he wanted to travel quickly and at a high speed to reach a distant place in time.
30. **“How many ears has each one of you?”** This expression is often used when one wants to warn people against an impending danger, and it means “listen attentively, I have the following warning to give you.”
31. **Àgbìgbò-niwọ̀nràn**. This is the full form of the name Àgbìgbò.

### **viii. Ifá Punished His Unfaithful Diviners**

In this poem, **Ọrúnmílà** instructed two parties of Ifá priests to merge together and go to the household of **Kútá-nlé** to perform divination. The two parties of Ifá priests involved are **Lápetún Ibísán** and **Ọkùnkùnbirìkùnbirìkù**. **Ọrúnmílà** also instructed them about what to do with their divination gains. He said that if, in the course of divination they received a dog, they should give it to **Bákeé** (i.e. **Èṣù** the trickster divinity); if they received a "tall historic cock", they should give it to **Ọsùn** (a divinity worshipped by Ifá priests); if they received a big pigeon, they should give it to **Odù** (another divinity worshipped by Ifá priests); if they received a mighty fish, they should give it to **Bàbá-òde** (i.e. **Ṣànpòná**, the Small-pox divinity); if they received plenty of palm-oil together with a giant-rat, they should give it to **Iyámi Ọsòròngà** (i.e. the witches). In addition, **Ọrúnmílà** specified that if they received alligator pepper, good kolanuts, well-brewed guinea-corn beer and pregnant goats they should deliver everything to him.

When the two parties of Ifá priests arrived in the household of **Kútá-nlé**, they received all the things listed for them but they did not give anyone of the materials to the people they were meant for. As a punishment for disobedience and contravention of their instructions, the unfaithful Ifá priests were struck with blindness for seven years, seven months, seven days, three days and one last and final day. After some friends of **Ọrúnmílà** had begged him, he agreed to pardon the unfaithful priests but he asked them to go back to the household of **Kútá-nlé** to perform sacrifice with the same instructions that he first gave them.

When the blind diviners reached their destination, and they got all the items listed for them, they went

quickly and delivered the materials to the persons for whom they were meant. **Ọrúnmílà** then asked them to go and fetch the leaves of **òòyà** tree and to bring two hair combs. With these, **Ọrúnmílà** prepared some medicine for them and they regained their sights.

There are a number of notable points in this poem. First, we see that Ifá diviners usually practise together in groups or parties. Each group has a name of its own although each individual member also has his own name. Both the names of the individual members and the name of the whole group are usually nick-names. Such nick-names may be meaningful only to members of the group and those people (either their clients, friends or family members) who are closely associated with them. Furthermore, we see from this poem that two different groups of Ifá diviners could merge together for the purpose of performing a particular function.

The tradition of having Ifá priests in groups practising together survives till today. When one goes to the house of an important Ifá priest for divination, one usually finds that there are a number of other priests practising together with him under the same roof. The most important and most senior of them all sees only to important matters or difficult problems of divination or healing which his subordinates cannot solve. One may, indeed, not see the face of their superior at all unless one specifically requests for him. This tradition of divination practice among Ifá priests therefore surprisingly parallels the tradition of Western medical practice in big hospitals.

Secondly, in this poem, we see the consequences of flouting the sanctions of Ifá divination. Every Ifá priest is under a divine sanction to do certain things in



accordance with traditional laid-down processes. For example, the sacrifice which an Ifá priest receives from his divination practice must never be kept to himself. He has been taught and disciplined during his training that he must always give a dog offered for sacrifice to either **Èṣù** or **Ògún**, and that he must offer palm-oil to the **àjé** (the witches). Whenever he is in doubt, he can always consult his divination instruments as to what to do with the sacrifices he accepted. Any Ifá priest who contravenes this divine order runs the risk of suffering the consequences which could be illness or death. This is why in traditional Yoruba society, Ifá priests were faithful, dependable and dutiful. Despite the important and onerous duties which they performed in society, Ifá priests were usually poor since they received no direct wages for their services and they were under strict sanctions which forbade them from making use of all the sacrifices they collected for their own benefit.

The diviners in this poem were struck with blindness because they did not keep to the instructions given to them by **Òrúnmìlà**. These were not mere instructions because in the Yoruba original text, the word **àṣẹ** (divine authority, sanction or commandment) is used. It was not until the diviners went back and executed their duties according to their instructions that they regained their sights after more than seven years.

- Tété ìnbá lé,  
 Àtárí pòòná mo dé,  
 Mo gbóhùun dùùrù.  
 Igbó réré mo dé,
- 5 Mo gbóhùun alágo.  
 Bẹẹ lohùn agogo ò johùn dùùrù.  
 Bẹẹ lohùn agogo ò johùn tààjà.  
 Èmí yà títí,  
 Mo bá pẹrun àlkú.
- 10 Èmí rìnnà títí,  
 Mo bémìná ọrun àlẹ̀.  
 Bẹẹ lemìná ọrun àlẹ̀  
 Kí ẹ́rúu bàbáà mi Alájere.  
 Èmí yà títí,
- 15 Mo bẹ̀ni wẹ̀sewẹ̀se  
 Níbi tí wọ̀n gbé ńdífá.  
 Èmí rìnnà títí,  
 Mo béèyàn wẹ̀sewẹ̀se  
 Níbi tí wọ̀n gbé ńdìbò.
- 20 Ọ̀rọ̀rẹ̀ lẹ̀ fàlgùn,  
 Ọ̀rọ̀rẹ̀ lẹ̀ fàìtẹ̀,  
 Ọ̀rọ̀rẹ̀ bá wọ̀n kó wẹ̀sewẹ̀se lẹ̀gbẹ̀ awo.  
 Ijì tí mo jí,

- I would have sat down comfortably.  
 But when I got to the grassless cross-road,<sup>1</sup>  
 I heard the sound of *dùùru*.<sup>2</sup>  
 When I arrived at the distant forest,.
- 5 I heard the voice of the gong beater.  
 Whereas the sound of gongs is different from that  
 of *dùùrù*.  
 Whereas the sound of gongs is different from that  
 of *ààjà*.<sup>3</sup>  
 I went this way and that way for a long time on  
 my journey,  
 Until I reached the foot of the immortal palm tree  
 of heaven.
- 10 I travelled on my road for long,  
 Until I met *eminà* who refused to go to heaven.<sup>4</sup>  
 Whereas *eminà* who refused to go to heaven  
 Was not the slave of *Alájere*,<sup>5</sup> my father.  
 I travelled for long,
- 15 Until I met small, smart beings  
 Where they were performing *Ifá* divination.  
 I travelled on my road for long,  
 Until I met small, smart beings  
 Where they were making use of *ibò*<sup>6</sup> to perform  
 divination.
- 20 It is *òròré*<sup>7</sup> who is not tall,  
 It is *òròré* who is not bent,  
 But who moves about smartly with them in the  
 cult of *Ifá* priests.  
 As I woke up from my sleep,

Olóko ńroko.

- 25 Ìjì tí mo jí,  
Olódò ńrodò;  
Ìjì tí mo jí,  
Mo gbàràan bàbáà mi lérí.  
Àràan bàbáà mi,
- 30 Abọwọ gbọrọgbọrọ;  
Àràan bàbáà mi,  
Abẹsẹ gbọrọgbọrọ.  
Ẹ wàràan bàbáà mi bó ti lé gò goo gò  
Bí ẹyin arawo.
- 35 Wọn ní á lọ pe Lápẹtún Ibitán wá,  
Ká ké sí àwọn Òkùnkùn-birikùn-birikùn.  
Ọrúnmilá ní kí wọn ọ para pọ,  
Kí wọn ọ máa sawo lọ sílẹe Kútá-nlé,  
Omọ Olódùuyẹrẹ.
- 40 Ọrúnmilá ní bẹ ẹ bá sawo títí,  
Bẹ ẹ bá gbajá,  
Ẹ lọ lèé fún Bákeé.  
Bẹ ẹ bá gbàkùkọ ìtàn gálàjà,  
Ẹ lọ lèé fósùn.
- 45 Bẹ ẹ bá gbòjùkújùkẹ ẹyẹlé,  
Ẹ lọ lèé fódù,  
Eléyinjú egé.

- I saw farmers going to their farms.
- 25 As I woke up from my sleep,  
I saw fishermen going to the river.  
As I woke up from my sleep,  
I put my father's **àràn** drum <sup>8</sup> on my head.  
My father's **àràn** drum
- 30 Which has long long arms.  
My father's **àràn** drum  
Which has long long legs.  
See how my father's **àràn** drum is set down  
gracefully like the eggs of **arawo** bird. <sup>9</sup>
- 35 We were asked to go and call **Lápetún Ibitán**. <sup>10</sup>  
We were also asked to call on **Òkùnkùnbirikùnbiri-**  
**kùn** <sup>11</sup>.  
**Ọrúnmílà** asked that they should combine together,  
And go to perform divination in the household of  
**Kútá-nlé**, <sup>12</sup>  
Offspring of **Olódùuyèrè**. <sup>13</sup>
- 40 **Ọrúnmílà** said, "If you perform divination for long,  
And you receive an offering of a dog,  
Go and give it to **Bákeé**. <sup>14</sup>  
If you receive a tall cock,  
Go and give it to **Òsùn**. <sup>15</sup>
- 45 If you receive a big pigeon,  
Go and give it to **Odù**,  
The one with very beautiful eyes.

- Bẹ ẹ bá gbàkájamòlé wòòkò wooko,  
 Ẹ lọ lèé kó o fún Bàbá-òde.
- 50 Bẹ ẹ bá gbòlágbalagbà epo òun ewúsà,  
 Ẹ lọ lèé kó o fún Ìyàmi, òsòròhngà,  
 Apanimọwàágún, olókíkí-òru,  
 Ajèdò-tútù-mọ-bì,  
 Obìnrin kúkúró rẹgírẹgí,
- 55 Èyí tí lọ nígbà ọjà bá tú,  
 Ó ní bẹ ẹ bá sawo tí tí o,  
 Bẹ ẹ bá délée Kútá-nlé,  
 Omọ Olódùuyẹrẹ ;  
 Bẹ ẹ ba gbata tí ò sījú,
- 60 Bẹ ẹ bá gbobì tí ọ làdò,  
 Bẹ ẹ bá gbọtí abọda,  
 Bẹ ẹ bá gbewúrẹ méjì abàmú rẹdẹrẹdẹ,  
 Ẹ kó o foun Ọrúnmílà wá.  
 Wọn wáá sawo tí tí o,
- 65 Wọn délée Kútá-nlé,  
 Omọ Olódùuyẹrẹ.  
 Wọn sawo tí tí,  
 Wọn gbajá,  
 Wọn ò fún Bákeé.
- 70 Wọn gbàkùkọ ìtàn gálàjà,

- If you receive a big fish,  
Go and give it to **Bàbá-òde**<sup>17</sup>.
- 50 If you receive plenty of palm-oil and a giant rat,  
Go and give it to **Ìyàmi**,<sup>18</sup> nicknamed **Òṣòròngà**,  
She who kills one and eats one's meat all alone,  
famous one at night.  
She who eats raw liver without vomiting<sup>19</sup>.  
The very short woman
- 55 Who goes about when the market has dispersed".<sup>20</sup>  
He added, "If you perform divination for long,  
And you arrive in the household of **Kútá-nlé**,  
Offspring of **Olódùuyèrè**.  
If you receive alligator pepper,
- 60 If you receive good kolanuts,  
If you receive well-brewed beer,  
If you receive two goats pregnant with heavy  
foetus,  
Bring them all to **Ọrúnmilà**".  
They performed divination for long.
- 65 And arrived at the home of **Kútá-nlé**,  
Offspring of **Olódùuyèrè**.  
They performed divination for long,  
And received a dog as offering,  
But they did not give it to **Bákeé**.
- 70 They received a tall cock,

Wọn ò fósùn.  
Wọn gbòjúkújùkẹ eyẹlé,  
Wọn ò fódù,  
Ẹlẹyinjú ẹgẹ.

75 Wọn gbàkájamòlé wòòkò wooko,  
Wọn ò ko o fún Bàbá òde mọ.  
Wọn gbọlágbalagbà epo òun ewúsà,  
Wọn ò kó o fún Ìyàmi òsòròhà,  
Apanimọwàágún, olókìkì-òru,

80 Ajẹdọ-tútù-mọ-bì,  
Obìnrin kúkúró rẹgírẹgí,  
Ẹyí tíì lẹ nígbà ọjà bá tú.  
Wọn sawo tíí o,  
Wọn délee Kútá-nlé,

85 Omọ Olódùuyẹrẹ,  
Wọn gbata tí ò sọjú,  
Wọn gbobì tí ọ làdọ,  
Wọn gbọtí abọda,  
Wọn gbẹwúré méjì abàmú rẹdẹrẹdẹ.

90 Wọn ò kó o fún Ọrúnmilà wá.  
Ọrúnmilà wáá mú isú,  
Ó fi sù wọn lójú,  
Ó mú òkùnkùn,  
Ó fi kùn wọn lójú biribiri.

95 Lójú ọdún méje.



- But they did not give it to **Òsùn**.  
 They received a big pigeon,  
 But they did not give it to **Odù**,  
 The one with very beautiful eyes.
- 75 They received a very big fish,  
 They did not give it to **Bàbá-òde**.  
 They received plenty of palm-oil and a giant rat,  
 But they did not give it to **Iyàmi** nicknamed  
**Òsòròngà**,  
 She who kills one and eats one's meat all alone,  
 famous one at night,
- 80 She who eats raw liver without vomiting.  
 The very short woman  
 Who goes about when the market has dispersed.  
 They performed divination for long,  
 And arrived at the home of **Kútá-nlé**,
- 85 Offspring of **Olódùuyèrè**.  
 They received alligator pepper;  
 They received good kolanuts;  
 They received well-brewed beer;  
 They received two goats pregnant with heavy  
 foetus;
- 90 But they did not bring them to **Ọrúnmìlà**.  
**Ọrúnmìlà** therefore took **isú<sup>21</sup>**,  
 And used it to blinden their eyes.  
 He took darkness,  
 And used it to darken their eyes completely.
- 95 For seven years,

Ọdún méje náà lé oşù méje.  
 Oşù méje náà lé ọjọ méje.  
 Ọjọ méje náà lé ọjọ mэта.  
 Ọjọ mэта náà lé arẹfùrẹfù-alẹ.

- 100 Wọn ni, “è é e è é à e”.  
 Bọmọ ọ bá mọbi tí ńrẹ,  
 Ọmọ a sì máa mọbi tó ti wá.  
 Àwọn Eşinşin-ní-forí-sọ-sérin-nsẹsẹ-nsẹsẹ,  
 Àwọn ní tí şefá fún wọn
- 105 Nílee Kútá-nlé,  
 Ọmọ Olódùuyẹrẹ.  
 Wọn ní kí wọn ọ yẹ àwọn lówọ kan ibò wò.  
 A à rífá míl lótùu 'Fẹ,  
 Ọbàrà Méjì náà la rí.
- 110 Wọn ní àşẹ mэфà ni Ọrúnmlá kàn fun yín,  
 Mэфẹẹfà náà lẹ sé.  
 Wọn ní kí wọn ó réku méjì olùwéré,  
 Kí wọn ọ rėja méjì abìwẹgbàdà,  
 Kí wọn ó rú obídìẹ méjì abẹdọ lùkẹlùkẹ,
- 115 Ewúré méjì abàmú rẹdẹrẹdẹ.  
 Gbogbo rẹ náà ni wọn rú.  
 Wọn wáá ní ta ní ọ wáá bá wọn bè é o ?  
 Wọn ní, “Ọwọ-ọmọ-ara”,.

And seven months,  
And seven days,  
Plus three days,  
And one memorable last day.

- 100 They shouted with a loud voice saying,  
“è é e è é à e.

If a child does not know where he is going,  
He should know from where he is coming”.

The party of Ifá priests known as

**Eṣinṣin-níí-foríí-sọ-sẹ́rin-nsẹ́sẹ́ nsẹ́sẹ́<sup>22</sup>**

Were the Ifá priests who used to perform  
Ifá divination for them

- 105 In the household of **Kútá-nlé**,  
Offspring of **Olódùuyèrẹ́**.

They asked this party of Ifá priests to make use of  
**ibò** to perform divination for them.

We saw no other Ifá at **Òtù Ifẹ́**

Other than **Ọ̀bàrà Mèjì**.<sup>23</sup>

- 110 The Ifá priests told them that **Ọ̀rúnmìlà**  
gave them six don'ts

But they broke all of them.

They were told to perform sacrifice with two fast-  
moving rats,

Two fish that swim gracefully;

Two hens with big livers;

- 115 Two goats pregnant with heavy foetus.

They offered everything for sacrifice.

Then they asked who would help them to beg  
**Ọ̀rúnmìlà**?

The Ifá priests answered and said,

“A person named **Ọ̀wọ́-ọ̀mọ́-ara**<sup>24</sup>

Ọrẹ Ọrúnmilà ni è.

120 “Èsẹ-ọmọ-ara,”

Ọrẹ Ọrúnmilà ni è.

“Èyàn-kìi-rawọ-fẹpà-kẹpà-ó-tún-jó-ni-lọwọ-mọ,

Ọrẹ Ọrúnmilà ni è.

Àwọn ni wọn bá wọn bẹ Ọrúnmilà.

125 Ọrúnmilá ní òún gbà.

Ó ní kí wọn ó réku méjì olùwéré,

Kí wọn ó rẹja méjì abìwẹgàdà,

Kí wọn ó rú obídlẹ méjì abẹdọ lùkẹlùkẹ,

Èwúré méjì abàmú rẹdẹdẹ.

130 Ìgbà tọ gba gbogbo rẹ lọwọọ wọn tán,

Ó ní kí wọn ó para pọ,

Kí wọn ó máa sawo lọ sílẹ Kútá-nlé,

Ọmọ Olódùuyẹrẹ.

Ọ ní bẹ ẹ bá sawo títi,

135 Bẹ ẹ bá délẹ Kútá-nlé,

Ọmọ Olódùuyẹrẹ

Bẹ ẹ bá sawo títi,

Bẹ ẹ bá gbajá,

Ẹ lọ lẹé fún Bákeé,

140 Bẹ ẹ bá gbàkùkọ ìtàn gálàjà,

Is a friend of **Ọrúnmilà**.

120 And another person named **Èsẹ̀-omọ̀-ara** <sup>25</sup>

Is a friend of **Ọrúnmilà**.

And another person named **Èyàn-kíl-rawọ̀-**

**fẹ̀pà-kẹ̀pà-ó-tún-jó-ni-lọ̀wọ̀-mọ̀** <sup>26</sup>

Is also a friend of **Ọrúnmilà**."

Those were the people who helped them to beg  
**Ọrúnmilà**,

125 And he accepted their pleadings.

He asked them to offer two fast-moving rats,

Two fish that swim gracefully,

Two hens with big livers,

Two goats pregnant with heavy foetus.

130 After taking all these offerings from them,

He asked them to combine together again,

And go to perform divination in the household of

**Kútá-nlé**,

Offspring of **Olódùuyèrè**,

He said, "If you perform divination for long,

135 And you arrive in the household of **Kútá-nlé**,

Offspring of **Olódùuyèrè**,

If you perform divination for long,

And you receive a dog,

Go and give it to **Bákeé**.

140 If you receive a tall, historic cock,

E lọ lèé fÓsùn,  
ᑭé ẹ bá gbòjúkújùkẹ ẹyẹlé,  
E lọ lèé fÓdù,  
Eléyinjú ẹgẹ.

145 Bẹ ẹ bá gbàkájamọlé wòòkò wooko,  
E lọ lèé kó o fún Bàbá-òde.  
Bẹ ẹ bá gbọlágbalagbà epo òun ewúsà,  
E lọ lèé kó o fún Ìyàmi, òsòròngà,  
Apanimọwàágún, olókíkí-òru,

150 Ajèdò-tútù-mọ-bì,  
Obìnrin kúkúrukú rẹgírẹgí,  
Èyí tíi lọ nígbà ọjà bá tú.  
Ó ní bẹ ẹ bá sawo tíí o,  
Bẹ ẹ bá délée Kútá-nlé;

155 Ọmọ Olódùuyèrè,  
Bẹ ẹ bá sawo tíí,  
Bẹ ẹ bá gbata tí ò síjú,  
Bẹ ẹ bá gbobì tí ò làdò,  
Bẹ ẹ bá gbọtí abọda,

160 Bẹ ẹ bá gbewúrẹ méjì abàmú rẹdẹrẹdẹ,  
E kó o foun Ọrúnmìlà wá.  
Wọn wáá sawo tíí o,  
Wọn délée Kútá-nlé,

Go and give it to **Òsùn**.  
If you receive a very big pigeon,  
Go and give it to **Odù**,  
The one with beautiful eyes.

- 145 If you receive a very big fish,  
Go and give it to **Bàbá-òde**.  
If you receive plenty of palm-oil and a giant rat,  
Go and give it to **Ìyàmi**, nicknamed **òsòróhà**,  
She who kills one and eats one's meat all  
alone, famous one at night.

- 150 She who eats raw liver without vomiting.  
The very short woman,  
Who goes about when the market has dispersed".  
He added, "If you perform divination for long,  
If you arrive in the household of **Kútá-nlé**,

- 155 Offspring of **Olódùuyèrè**.  
If you perform divination for long,  
And you receive alligator pepper,  
If you receive good kolanuts,  
If you receive well-brewed beer,

- 160 If you receive two goats pregnant with heavy  
foetus,  
Bring them all to **Ọ̀rúnmlà**".  
They performed divination for long,  
And arrived in the household of **Kútá-nlé**,

Ọmọ Olódùuyẹrẹ.

- 165 Wọn ọawo tí,   
 Wọn gbajá,   
 Wọn yára lọ lẹé fún Bákeé.   
 Wọn gbàkùkọ itàn gálàjà,   
 Wọn yára lọ lẹé fỌsùn.
- 170 Wọn gbòjùkújùkẹ eyelẹ,   
 Wọn yára lọ lẹé fỌdù,   
 Ẹlẹyinjú ẹgẹ.   
 Wọn gbàkájamọlé wòòkò wooko,   
 Wọn yára lọ lẹé kó o fún Bàbá-òde.
- 175 Wọn gbọlágbalagbà epo òun ewúsa,   
 Wọn yára lọ lẹé kó o fún iyàmi òsòròngà,   
 Apanimọwàágún, olókíkí-òru,   
 Ajẹdọ-tútù-mọ-bì,   
 Obìnrin kúkúró rẹgírẹgí,
- 180 Ẹyí tí lọ nígbà ọjà bá tú.   
 Wọn wáá ọawo tí o,   
 Wọn délée Kútá-nlé,   
 Ọmọ Olódùuyẹrẹ.   
 Wọn gbata tí ò ọjù,
- 185 Wọn gbobì tí ọ làdọ,   
 Wọn gbọtí abọda,



Offspring of **Olódùuyèrè**.

- 165 They performed divination for long,  
They received a dog,  
And hastened to give it to **Bákeé**.  
They received a tall, historic cock,  
And hastened to give it to **Òsùn**.
- 170 They received a big pigeon,  
And hastened to give it to **Odù**,  
The one with beautiful eyes.  
They received a very big fish,  
And hastened to give it to **Bàbá-òde**.
- 175 They received plenty of palm-oil and a giant rat,  
And hastened to give it to **iyàmi**, nicknamed  
**Òsòròngà**  
He who kills one and eats one's meat all alone,  
famous one at night.  
He who eats raw liver without vomiting.  
The very short woman,
- 180 Who goes about when the market has dispersed.  
They performed divination for long,  
And arrived in the household of **Kútá-nlé**,  
Offspring of **Olódùuyèrè**.  
They received alligator pepper;
- 185 They received good kolanuts;  
They received well-brewed beer;

Wọn gbewúré méjì abàmú ẹ̀dẹ̀ẹ̀dẹ̀.  
Wọn yára lọ lẹ́ kó o fún Ọ̀rúnmlá wá.  
Ọ̀rúnmlá wáá ní kí wọn ọ̀ lọ lẹ́ jáwé òdòyà wá,

190 Kí wọn ọ̀ ra òdòyà méjì sì.  
Ọ̀rúnmlá ló dojúgboro àfín.  
Ọ̀rìyà,  
Yà mí lójú nrína,  
Ọ̀rìyà.

195 Kí nrínà rájé,  
Nrínà ráyà.  
Ọ̀rìyà,  
Yà mí lójú nrína,  
Ọ̀rìyà.

200 Kí nrínà rílẹ̀,  
Nrínà rọmọ.  
Ọ̀rìyà,  
Yà mí lójú nrína,  
Ọ̀rìyà.

205 Kí nrínà nílẹ̀ awo.  
Ọ̀rìyà,  
Yà mí lójú nrína,  
Ọ̀rìyà.  
Kí nríná ríre gbogbo.

They received two goats pregnant with heavy  
foetus;

They hastened to give everything to **Òrúnmìlà**.

**Òrúnmìlà** then asked them to go and pluck **òòyà**  
leaf, <sup>27</sup>

190 And buy two hair combs.

**Òrúnmìlà** said, "The albino never sees well.

**Òrìyà** leaf,

Open my eyes so that I may see.

**Òrìyà** leaf.

195 So that I may see money,

So that I may see my wife;

**Òrìyà** leaf,

Open my eyes so that I may see;

**Òrìyà** leaf.

200 So that I may see my home,

So that I may see my children;

**Òrìyà** leaf,

Open my eyes so that I may see,

**Òrìyà** leaf.

205 So that I may see in the Ifá cult house.

**Òrìyà** leaf,

Open my eyes so that I may see.

**Òrìyà** leaf.

So that I may see all good things,

210 Òrìyà,  
Yà mí lójú nrína,  
Òrìyà.  
Òrìyà,  
Yà mí lójú nrína,  
215 Òrìyà.

210 Òrìyà leaf,  
Open my eyes so that I may see.  
Òrìyà leaf.  
Òrìyà leaf,  
Open my eyes so that I may see.  
215 Òrìyà leaf”.

## NOTES

1. "The grassless cross-road". The Yoruba original likens the grasslessness of the cross-road to a very bald head.
2. **Dùùrù**. A traditional Yoruba musical instrument which makes a deep bass voice. This is also the modern Yoruba name for the organ.
3. **Ààjà**. A traditional musical instrument used in the worship of **Òṣàálá**, the creation god.
4. **Èmìnà** who refused to go to heaven. The ghost of a dead person which could not go to heaven. The Yoruba believe that the ghosts of some people do not go back to heaven after their deaths if at the time of their deaths, they had not finished spending the number of years allotted to them by their chosen destinies. The ghosts of such people continue to wander about on earth until their time on earth is over.
5. **Alájere**. Name of an obscure Yoruba god.
6. **Ìbò**. Divination instrument for casting lots. See introduction pages 20-22 for full details.
7. **Òròré**. One of the tiniest birds of West Africa. This bird is so tiny that its young and old ones are hardly different in size.
8. **Àràn** drum. An Ifá traditional drum. See introduction, page 20, for full details.
9. **Arawo** bird. A mighty bird which lays very big eggs.
10. **Lápetún Ibitán**. These are the personal names of someone who in this story is an Ifá priest.
11. **Okùnkùnbirikùnbirikùn**. Name of a party of Ifá priests which literally means "Total and complete darkness".

12. **Kútá-nlé.** A personal name.
13. **Olódùuyèrè.** Probably a title which means "Owner of **Odù** and **iyèrè.**" **Odù** here could refer to the categories of Ifá literary corpus or to a minor god worshipped by Ifá priests which bears the same name. **Iyèrè** refers to a type of Ifá divination poetry in chanted and choral form.
14. **Bákeé.** Another name for **Èṣù**, the trickster god.
15. **Òsùn.** A minor god worshipped by Ifá priests. Its symbol is a staff which must not lie flat on the ground.
16. **Odù.** Refers to the god known by that name worshipped by Ifá priests.
17. **Bàbá-òde.** Refers to **Sànpòná**, the terrible Yoruba god of small-pox. The name **Bàbá-òde** literally means "father who lives outside". This god is so called because his shrine is always outside the house since he is believed to be too terrible and restless to live inside. He is believed to be responsible for small-pox epidemics and his priests are the traditional doctors of that disease.
18. **Iyàmi.** This is a popular name for the Yoruba witches also known as **àjé.** This name literally means "my mother". People use the name **Iyàmi** for the witches in order to avoid the use of the word **àjé** which is believed to be too plain a reference to them.
19. Yoruba witches are believed to be fond of eating human liver.
20. The Yoruba believe that the witches go about at night when all activities in the public places (for example, in the markets) have ceased.
21. **Iṣú.** A medicinal preparation which is believed to

- have the power of causing temporary blindness when used against an enemy.
22. **Eṣinsin-níí-foríí-sọ-sérin-nsésé-nsésé.** Name of a party of Ifá priests which means "It is the house-fly which knocks its head against the iron rod persistently".
  23. **Ọbàrà Méjì.** The seventh of the sixteen major categories of Ifá divination poetry.
  24. **Ọwọ-ọmọ-ara.** Nickname of an Ifá priest which literally means "Hands are the children of the body".
  25. **Ẹsẹ-ọmọ-ara.** Name of another Ifá priest which means "Legs are the children of the body".
  26. **Ẹ̀ẹ̀yàn-kíí-rawọ́-fẹ̀pà-kẹ̀pà-ó-tún-jó-nì-lọ́wọ́-mọ́.** Name of an Ifá priest meaning "No one rubs hot groundnut against the palms and fails to get relief from its burns".
  27. **Òòyà** leaf. Name of a leaf believed to have the power of curing blindness.



ix. The Great Conflict Between **Ayé** (Earth)  
And **Ọrun** (Heaven) Or Why the Vulture  
Has A Bald Head And the Child Sucks  
Its Mother's Breasts.

The Yoruba conceive of the universe as consisting of two physical planes of existence, **ayé** (earth) and **ọrun** (heaven). Originally, these two planes were not completely separated from each other according to some Yoruba myths. In other words, they both probably belonged to the same planet. All that a visitor from one plane of existence to the other had to do at that time was to pass through a border gate manned by a gate-keeper.

In the following poem, which has obvious similarities with some Yoruba prose narratives, the story is told of the conflict between **ayé** and **ọrun**. In some prose narratives, this conflict is cited as the reason for the withdrawal of **ọrun** skywards. The poem also purports to explain why the vulture has a bald head and why the child sucks its mother's breasts. There are, therefore, three distinct motifs merged into one in this poem.

The first motif concerns the conflict between **ayé** and **ọrun** over a bush rat killed after burning a thick forest. This event probably took place on earth. A quarrel ensued between **ilẹ**, (lord of the earth) known in this story as king **Àjàláyé**, and **ọrun** (who is also called variously in the story as king **Àjàlọrun** or **Olódùmarè**) over who would take possession of the only bush rat. The one claimed to be superior to the other and therefore laid claim to the bush rat. At last, **ọrun** left the rat in anger and retired to his abode up in the sky. The result was lack of rain and the disturbance of the fertility and reproductive cycle on earth.

The earth was therefore threatened with catastrophe and *ilẹ* (lord of the earth) and all the 'inhabitants' of the earth were forced to recognize the supremacy of *òrun* over *ayé*. They therefore decided to send back the bush rat which caused the quarrel to king *Àjàlòrun*. But since he had moved sky-wards, the only 'inhabitants' of the earth who could perform this task were the birds who could fly very high up in the sky. After all the 'inhabitants' of the earth—human beings, animals and birds—had gathered in the palace of king *Àjàláyé*, the birds started to take turns trying to fly the bush-rat to *òrun*. After several fruitless attempts by other birds, the vulture, a bird deemed unhealthy because of his clumsy appearance, surprisingly succeeded in taking the rat to *òrun*.

The result of the return of the bush-rat to king *Àjàlòrun* was that before the vulture arrived back on the earth, rain started to fall. The vulture returned to the earth in the rain and met his fellow creatures elated by the fall of rain after a long spell of drought. So joyful were they that they did not recognise the vulture again when he arrived back on the earth so that everyone denied him shelter from the rain. The vulture's head became bald due to the many knocks he received on his head while trying to force his way into some of his neighbour's houses to take shelter from the heavy rain.

The third motif centres on the vulture's mother who was ill when he was going to *òrun*. Despite the assurance given to the vulture by everyone that they would take care of his mother, the confusion that followed the sight of rain by the 'inhabitants' of the earth, led to total neglect of the vulture's mother. Even her corpse was not treated decently after her death. She was not, in fact, buried at all. Instead, she was thrown into the rub-

bish heap near her home where the vulture saw her and ate her up by mistake. When the vulture eventually discovered that he had eaten his mother's corpse, he cursed all the 'inhabitants' of the earth and their future issues with the words :

“Any child who has not tasted of his mother  
Will never become useful in life”.

The curse of the vulture is therefore said to be the reason why children suck their mothers' breasts.

Òkè-ṣe-ribiti-ṣorí-sonso,  
A díá fún Ọba Àjàláyé;  
Òkè-ṣe-ribiti-ṣorí-sonso,  
A díá fún Ọba Àjàlọrun,

- 5 Àwọn méjèèjì níjìà àgbàá relé Olódùmarè.  
Ọrẹ̀ ní Ọba Àjàláyé àtí Ọba Àjàlọrun.  
Ní wọn bá gbìmọ̀ràn,  
Wọn dìjọ dá ihọ kan sí.  
Ìgbà tó tó àkókò tó yẹ,
- 10 Ní wọn bá kun ihọ náà.  
Ihọ jó jóó jó,  
Ṣùgbọ̀n tó fí jó tán,  
Èranko kan ọ̀ jáde m̀bẹ̀.  
Ìgbà tí ihọ jó tán,
- 15 Ní wọn bá bọ̀ sínúu pápá,  
Wọn bèrẹ̀ síí dẹ̀ isà.  
Wọn dẹ̀sà dẹ̀sà,  
Wọn ọ̀ rí èranko pa,  
Àfí ẹ̀mọ̀ lógbọ̀rọ̀ kan bá yíí.
- 20 Ìgbà tó di wí pé wọn ó pín yà,  
Ní wọn bá fọ̀wọ̀ sí ìjà lórí ẹ̀mọ̀ náà.  
Ọba Àjàláyé ní òun làgbà.  
Òun ló sì yẹ kí òun ó mú ẹ̀mọ̀ náà lọ.

It is the hill which is round and mighty with a pointed apex.

Ifá divination was performed for the king with the title of **Àjàláyé**.<sup>1</sup>

It is the hill which is round and mighty with a pointed apex.

Ifá divination was performed for the king with the title of **Àjàlórún**.<sup>2</sup>

- 5 Both of them quarrelled until they reached the abode of **Olódùmarè** over seniority.

King **Àjàláyé** and king **Àjàlórún** were friends.

They both deliberated together,

And preserved a large forest.<sup>3</sup>

At the appropriate time,<sup>4</sup>

- 10 They burnt the forest.

The forest burnt for a long time,

But even till it finished burning,

No animal came out of it.

When the forest had been completely burnt,

- 15 They entered into the field,

And started to destroy the holes of animals.

They destroyed many holes,

But they found no animal

Except one small **ẹmọ** rat.<sup>5</sup>

- 20 When it was time for the hunting party to disperse,  
they started to quarrel over the **ẹmọ** rat.

King **Àjàláyé** said that he was the senior,<sup>6</sup>

And as such he should be the one to take away  
the **ẹmọ** rat.

- Qba Àjàlọrun ní òun lẹgbón,
- 25 Ó ní òun ni òun ó mùú ẹmọ lọ.  
 Nígbà tí ijà náà ọ wọ ẹmọ,  
 Ni ọba Àjàlọrun bá bínú,  
 Ọ sọ ẹmọ sílẹ,  
 Ọ padà sí ọrun.
- 30 Ó ní láìpẹ jọjọ,  
 Gbogbo ayé ọ mọ àgbà láàrin àwọn méjèèjì.  
 Lọ bá di wí pé ọjò ọ rọ ẹmọ.  
 Ìrì ọ sẹ,  
 Bẹẹ ni ẹwọ ọ sí.
- 35 Iṣú pẹyin ọ ta,  
 Àgbàdó tàpẹ ọ gbó,  
 Erée yojú ọpọlọ.  
 Aboyún ọ bí ẹmọ,  
 Àgàn ọ tọwọ àlà bosùn.
- 40 Òkùnrùn ọ dìde,  
 Akérémodòó wẹwù iràwé.  
 Àtọ gbẹ ẹmọ ọmọkùnrin nídlí,  
 Obìnrin ọ rí àsẹẹ rẹ ẹmọ.  
 Ìyán mú múú mú,
- 45 Ó polómùú,  
 Òjò páápàápáá kán sílẹ,

- King **Ājālōrun** said that he was older,
- 25 And therefore he would take away the **ẹmọ** rat.  
 When the quarrel became very bitter,  
 King **Ājālōrun** became angry,  
 He dropped the **ẹmọ** rat,  
 And went back to heaven.
- 30 He said that before long  
 All the world would know who was the senior be-  
 tween the two of them.  
 The result was that rain ceased to fall.  
 Dew did not drip down,  
 Neither did small particles of rain appear:
- 35 Yams grew small tubers which could not develop.  
 Corn grew small ears which could not ripen.  
 Bean flowered but could not develop further.  
 Pregnant women could not deliver their babies,  
 Barren women could not dip their hands in cam-  
 wood ointment.<sup>7</sup>
- 40 The sick remained infirm.  
 Small rivers wore garments of falling leaves.<sup>8</sup>  
 Semen became dried up inside men's reproductive  
 organs.  
 Women stopped seeing their menstrual flow.  
 The famine was so intense
- 45 That it killed even he who normally had plenty of  
 food.  
 Small drops of rain dropped down,

- Adiẹ sà á mi.  
A pọn abẹ silẹ,  
Ewúré mú un jẹ.
- 50 Nígba tí gbogbo ayé ọ gbádùn mọ,  
Ni wọn bá gbára jọ,  
Wọn mééjì kẹ́ẹ́ta,  
Wọn looko aláwo.  
Wọn lọ ké sí,
- 55 Àwọn Òkè-ṣe-ribìtì-ṣorí-sonso,  
Awo ni wọn.  
Wọn ní kí wọn ó réku méjì olùwéré,  
Kí wọn ọ réja méjì abìwègbàdà,  
Kí wọn ó rú obídiẹ méjì abèdò lùkẹ́lùkẹ́.
- 60 Ewúré méjì abámú rẹdẹrẹdẹ,  
Ẹ́nlá méjì tó fíwo ẹ̀sòsùkà.  
Wọn ní kí wọn ó fẹmọ tó dijà náà kẹbọ rú.  
Gbogboo rẹ náà ni wọn rú.  
Àwọn awoo wọn wáá bi wọn pé,
- 65 Ta ní ọ bàá wọn gbé ẹmọ náà lọ sọrun ?  
Wọn ní ẹ̀dii rẹ ni pé,  
Bí ọba Àjàláyé ọ bá bẹ ọba Àjàlọrun dáadáa,  
Òde ẹ̀sáláyé ọ leè tòrò mọ láéláé.  
Ni wọn bá fi eku ẹmọ náà pèèsè sínú àwo.



And chickens hastened to pick them up.  
A razor was sharpened and placed on the ground,  
And goats devoured it.

- 50 When all the world no longer had peace,  
People gathered themselves together,  
Added two cowry-shells to three,  
And went to the domain of diviners.  
They went and consulted the diviners known as
- 55 It-is-the-hill-which-is-round-and-mighty-with-a-  
pointed-apex,  
They were a party of Ifá priests.  
The diviners asked for an offering of two fast-  
moving rats;  
Two fish which swim gracefully;  
Two hens with big livers,
- 60 Two goats pregnant and heavy with foetus;  
Two *ẹinlá* cows with big horns;  
And to include the *ẹmó* rat which caused the  
quarrel in the sacrifice.  
They offered everything as prescribed for sacrifice.  
Their diviners then asked them
- 65 For the person who would help them take the sa-  
crifice to heaven.  
They explained that the reason for sending some-  
one was that  
If king *Àjàláyé* did not beg king *Àjàlórún* suffici-  
ently,  
The earth would never again have peace.  
They then used the *ẹmó* rat to make sacrifice in-  
side a plate.

- 70 Ni Èşú bá gbé agogo sóde,  
 Ó pe gbogbo ẹyẹ,  
 Ó pe gbogbo ẹranko,  
 Ó pe gbogboo wọn jọ sí ààfin ọba Àjàláyé.  
 Kàngé-kàngé, babalawo igún,
- 75 Ló díá fúngún,  
 Wọn ní kí igún ó rúbọ,  
 Kí ọ mọ bàà ẹẹre gbabi.  
 Igún kọ, igún ò rú.  
 Ọ pawó lékèé,
- 80 Ó pe Èşù lólè,  
 Ọ wọrun yànyàànyàn  
 Bí ẹnì tí ò ní kú mọ láyẹ,  
 Ọ wáá kọtí ọgbọin sẹbọ.  
 Nígba tí gbogbo ayé pé jọ sí ìdí ẹbọ tán,
- 85 Ni àşá bá bọ síwájú,  
 Ó he ẹbọ nílẹ pọnkán,  
 Ó gbéra nílẹ,  
 Ọ dọrun.  
 Ni-gbogbo ayé bá bèrẹ síí kọrin pé:
- 90 “Kàngé-kàngé níí şOlomọ,  
 Kàngé níí şOlomọ.  
 Kàngé-kàngé níí şOlomọ,

- 70 Èṣù then brought out his gong,  
 And he sounded it in order to call all birds,  
 And all animals,  
 To assemble inside the palace of king Àjàláyé.  
 The Ifá priest named Kángẹ - kàngẹ, Ifá priest  
 of the vulture,
- 75 Performed Ifá divination for the vulture.  
 They told him to perform sacrifice  
 So that he might not come to harm by doing good.  
 The vulture refused to perform sacrifice.  
 He took his Ifá priests to be liars,
- 80 He took Èṣù for a thief,  
 He looked up fearfully towards heaven  
 Like a person who would never die on earth,  
 He turned a deaf ear to the prescribed sacrifice.  
 When all the inhabitants of the earth had  
 gathered together around their sacrifice,
- 85 The kite came out in front of everyone,  
 Grabbed the sacrifice,  
 Lifted himself up from the ground,  
 And flew towards heaven.  
 All the inhabitants of the earth then started  
 to sing saying:
- 90 “The one who lives to a very old age,  
 that is the hill.  
 The hill is the one who lives to a very old age  
 The one who lives to a very old age,  
 that is the hill.

- Kàngé ní sọlọmọ’.
- Kò pé tí wọn ti ñkọrin,
- 95 Ni wọn rí àṣá,  
Tí ñjáá bọ dọdọ láti ojú ọrun,  
Nígba tí ó rẹ ẹ.  
Ni àwòdì bá tún fò bọ síta.  
Ó ní òun ó gbèé ẹbọ náà.
- 100 Wọn ní kí òun náà ó gbìyànjú.  
Ó ní tòún tiẹ kúrò ní iyànjú.  
Ó ní òun tí ọ jẹ wí pé  
Ojú ọrun ní òun ñsùn.  
Ni òun náàá bá gbéra ñlẹ,
- 105 Ó dòde ọrun.  
Ni wọn bá tún ñkọrin pé :  
“Kàngé-kàngé ní sọlọmọ,  
Kàngé ní sọlọmọ.  
Àṣá gbébo, kò leè gbé e dọrun,
- 110 Kàngé ní sọlọmọ.  
Kàngé-kàngé ní sọlọmọ,  
Kàngé náà ní sọlọmọ.  
Láìpẹ, apá ñro òun náà,  
Ni òun náàá bá tún padà wálẹ.
- 115 Wọn ní àwọn ò wí fún ọ,  
Pé apáà rẹ ọ ká a.

The hill is the one who lives to an old age”.  
Not long after they started singing,

95 They saw the kite,  
Dropping down with great force in the sky,  
When he became tired.  
The black kite then came out,  
And boasted that he would carry the sacrifice  
away.

100 They allowed him to try his ability.  
But he boasted that his own would be much more  
than just trying  
Since he was the bird  
Who usually slept in the sky.  
He too lifted himself up from the ground,

105 And flew towards heaven.  
They then started singing again saying :  
“The one who lives to a very old age, that is the  
hill.  
The hill is the one who lives to a very old age.  
The kite carried the sacrifice, but could not take  
it to heaven.

110 The hill lives to a very old age.  
The one who lives to a very old age, that is the hill.  
The hill is certainly the one who lives to a very  
old age”.  
Before long, he too was feeling pain in his wings,  
And he too returned to the ground.

115 They said to him, “Didn’t we tell you,  
That it is beyond your ability”.

Ni àşádì bá fi ìbínú jáde,  
Ó ní ní ìşẹ́jú akàn ni òun ó gbèé ẹbọ náà dọrun.  
Ni òun náàá bá gbá gẹrẹ,

- 120 O gbé ẹbọ nílẹ,  
Ó gbéra nílẹ,  
Ọ dọrun.  
Ọkàan gbogbo ayé wáá balẹ,  
Wọn ní àşádì ó dèè ọrun dandan.
- 125 Ni wọn bá tún fọwọ sí orin ní kíkọ,  
Wọn níwí pé:  
“Kàngẹ-kàngẹ níí ẹỌlọmọ,  
Kàngẹ níí ẹỌlọmọ.  
Àşá gbẹbọ, kò leè gbé e dọrun,
- 130 Kàngẹ níí ẹỌlọmọ.  
Àwòdì gbẹbọ, kò leè gbe dọrun,  
Kàngẹ níí ẹỌlọmọ.  
Kàngẹ-kàngẹ níí ẹỌlọmọ,  
Kàngẹ náà níí ẹỌlọmọ.”
- 135 Nígba tí òun náà ò leè lọ mọ,  
Lọ bá padà wá sílẹ,  
Ó gbé ẹbọ wọn kalẹ fún wọn.  
Ni àkàlá bá bọ síwájú,  
Ọ gbá gẹrẹ,

- At that point, the eagle came out of the crowd in  
 anger,  
 And boasted that he would take the sacrifice to  
 heaven in a moment of time.  
 He too moved forcefully,
- 120 Picked up the sacrifice,  
 And lifted himself up from the ground,  
 And flew towards heaven.  
 Everybody's mind then settled down,  
 In the sure hope that the eagle would reach heaven.
- 125 They then started to sing again.  
 They were saying :  
 "The one who lives to a very old age, that is the  
 hill.  
 The hill is the one who lives to a very old age.  
 The kite carried the sacrifice, but he could not  
 take it to heaven;
- 130 The hill lives to a very old age.  
 The black kite carried the sacrifice, but he could  
 not take it to heaven.  
 The hill lives to a very old age.  
 The one who lives to a very old age, that is the hill.  
 The hill is certainly the one who lives to a very  
 old age".
- 135 But when he too could go no further,  
 He flew back to the ground,  
 And put down the sacrifice for them.  
 At that crucial time, àkàlà<sup>9</sup> went to the front of the  
 crowd,  
 He moved with great force,

- 140 Ọ gbẹbọ nílẹ,  
 Ọ dọrun.  
 Ní gbogbo ayé bá tún bèrè síí kọrin pé :  
 “Kàngé-kàngé níní ọlọmọ,  
 Kàngé níní ọlọmọ.
- 145 Àsá gbẹbọ, kò leè gbe dọrun,  
 Kàngé níní ọlọmọ.  
 Àwòdí gbẹbọ, kò leè gbé e dọrun,  
 Kàngé níní ọlọmọ.  
 Idii gbẹbọ, kò leè gbé e dọrun,
- 150 Kàngé níní ọlọmọ.  
 Kàngé-kàngé níní ọlọmọ,  
 Kàngé náà níní ọlọmọ.”  
 Ọ kọ dà bí ẹni pé àkàlá fẹẹẹ dọrun,  
 Sùgbọn nígbà tí ó ẹ,
- 155 Ní òun náàá bá wálẹ.  
 Ó ní òun ò leè lọ mọ.  
 Nígbà tí àkàlà padà wálẹ,  
 Tí ọ gbẹbọ kalẹ fún wọn tán,  
 Ní gbogbo ayé bá pa rọrọ.
- 160 Gbogbo àwọn ọlọgbọn sorí kọ.  
 Ẹnikan ò leè pe gúnnugún sí i,  
 Nítorí pé wọn mò pé araa rè ọ yá.



- 140 Picked up the sacrifice,  
 And flew towards heaven.  
 All the inhabitants of the earth then started to  
 sing again saying :  
 “The one who lives to a very old age, that is the hill.  
 The hill lives to a very old age.
- 145 The kite carried the sacrifice, but he could not  
 take it to heaven.  
 The hill lives to a very old age.  
 The black kite carried the sacrifice, but he could  
 not take it to heaven;  
 The hill lives to a very old age.  
 The eagle carried the sacrifice, but he could not  
 take it to heaven;
- 150 The hill lives to a very old age.  
 The one who lives to a very old age, that is the hill.  
 The hill is certainly the one who lives to a very old  
 age”.
- At first it seemed as if àkàlà was about to reach  
 heaven;  
 But after some time,
- 155 He too dropped down,  
 And said that he could not go any further.  
 When àkàlà dropped down,  
 And put the sacrifice before them again,  
 Everyone became extremely silent.
- 160 The wise men dropped their heads down.  
 No one could call on the vulture  
 Because they knew that he was not well.

- Eré ni, àwàdà ni,  
 Ni gúnugún bá jáde túú,
- 165 Ọ bọ sínú agbo,  
 Ó ní ẹ jẹ kí òun náà ọ dán an-wò ọ.  
 Ni igún bá ẹ kàngẹ kàngẹ,  
 Lọ bá gbẹbọ nìlẹ,  
 Ó wáà n̄sẹ kàngẹ kàngẹ kàngẹ kàngẹ
- 170 Bí ẹni pé yọọ jáá lulẹ.  
 Ó n̄sẹ bí ẹni pé yóó subú,  
 Bí ẹni pé yọọ yẹgẹ.  
 Báylí ni igún ẹ tí ó fi n̄sún mọ òde ọrun.  
 Wọn wáá nkọrin fún òun náà pé :
- 175 “Kàngẹ-kàngẹ. níí ẹỌlọmọ,  
 Kàngẹ níí ẹỌlọmọ.  
 Àsá gbẹbọ, kò leè gbé e dọrun,  
 Kàngẹ níí ẹỌlọmọ,  
 Àwòdí gbẹbọ, kò leè gbé e dọrun,
- 180 Kàngẹ níí ẹỌlọmọ.  
 Idíí gbẹbọ, kò leè gbé e dọrun,  
 Kàngẹ níí ẹỌlọmọ.  
 Àkàlá gbẹbọ, kò leè gbé e dọrun,  
 Kàngẹ níí ẹỌlọmọ.
- 185 Kàngẹ-kàngẹ níí ẹỌlọmọ,

But as if he was playing, as if he was jesting,  
The vulture silently came out,

165 Went in front of the crowd,  
And pleaded that he too should be allowed to try.  
Then, the vulture moved unsteadily like an old man,  
Picked up the sacrifice,  
And moved unsteadily all over the place

170 As if he would drop down.  
He was moving unsteadily as if he would fall down,  
As if he would drop to the ground.  
That was how the vulture moved along until he was  
near heaven.  
They started singing for him also saying :

175 "The one who lives to a very old age, that is the hill.  
The hill lives to a very old age.  
The kite carried the sacrifice but he could not  
take it to heaven;  
The hill lives to a very old age;  
The black kite carried the sacrifice, but he could  
not take it to heaven;

180 The hill lives to a very old age.  
The eagle carried the sacrifice but he could not take  
it to heaven;  
The hill lives to a very old age.  
Akala took the sacrifice, but he could not take  
it to heaven,  
The hill lives to a very old age.

185 The one who lives to a very old age, that is the hill,

Kàngé níí ẹ̀lòmọ.  
 Kàngé-kàngé níí ẹ̀lòmọ,  
 Kàngé náà níí ẹ̀lòmọ”.  
 Kàngé kàngé kàngé kàngé náà yí ní ígún ẹ

190 Tí ó fí dé ilé Olódùmarè.

Àárẹ kán ẹ̀ ní ẹ̀yá ígún  
 Ní ígún fí kúrò nílẹ.  
 Kí ígún ó tóó lọ,  
 Ó ní ta ní ó bàá òun tójú ẹ̀yá òun o ?

195 Gbogbo ayé dáhùn lóhùn kan pé

Àwọn ọ maa tójúu rẹ.  
 Bí ígún tí lọ tán,  
 Ní ẹ̀yáa rẹẹ bá kú.  
 Wọn ò kúkú yà sí i tẹlẹ.

200 Ìgbà tí ígún dé bodè ìsàlórùn,

Ọ kánkùn gbọn gbọn gbọn.  
 Oníbodè, ní, “ìwọọ ta nù un ?”  
 Ígún ní òun ígún ní.  
 Ó ní ọba Àjàláyé lọ rán òun sí ọba Àjàlórùn.

205 Ní Oníbodèé bá sílẹ̀kùn fún un.

Nígbà tí ígún dé iwájú ọba Àjàlórùn,  
 Ọ dọbálẹ̀ wọ,  
 Ó kẹ̀ẹ̀pẹ̀ kẹ̀ẹ̀pẹ̀.

The hill lives to a very old age.  
The one who lives to a very old age, that is the hill,  
The hill certainly lives to a very old age.  
It was in that unsteady manner that the vulture  
moved along,

190 Until he reached the home of **Olódùmarè**.  
But the vulture's mother was ill  
At the time when he left home.  
Before he finally disappeared,  
The vulture asked who would help him to take care  
of his mother.

195 All the inhabitants of the earth answered in one  
voice that  
They would take care of her.  
But as soon as the vulture disappeared,  
His mother died  
Since nobody took any care of her.

200 When the vulture arrived at the border gate of  
**Ìṣàlórùn**,<sup>10</sup>  
He knocked hard repeatedly on the door.  
The gate-keeper said, "Who are you?"  
And the vulture answered that it was he the vulture.  
He said that king **Àjàláyé** had sent him to king  
**Àjàlórùn**.

205 Then the gate-keeper opened the gate for him.  
When the vulture came in front of king **Àjàlórùn**,  
He prostrated himself immediately on the floor,  
And put dust upon his own head repeatedly,

- Ó ní ọba Àjàláyé ní kí òun ó kí ọ o.
- 210 Ó ní ọjọ tí àwọn ti jà,  
 Ní òde ìsáláyé ti dàrú o.  
 Òjò ọ rọ mọ o.  
 Ó ní ọba Àjàláyé ní kí òun ó túúbá o.  
 Kí o má ẹe bínú o.
- 215 Òun fi àgbà fún ọ látí òní lọ o.  
 Ní igún bá gbé ẹmọ náà fún ọba Àjàlọrun.  
 Olódùmarèé mi orí tíítíí,  
 Ọ rẹrín, ó dọkọkọ ẹ.  
 Ní Olódùmarèé bá mú igún bọ sí àgbàlá.
- 220 Ó ní kí ó ká àdó mẹta lágbàlá òun.  
 Ó ní èyí tọ bá dákẹ rọrọ ní kí ọ ká o.  
 Ó ní kí ọ má ẹe ká èyí  
 Tọ bá nẹe kámi kámì kámi.  
 Olódùmarèé ní bí ọ bá ti kúrò ní bodè,
- 225 Kí ọ la ọkan mọlẹ.  
 Bí ọ bá dé ìdajì ìsáláyé àti ìsálọrun,  
 Kí ọ la ọkan mọlẹ.  
 Bí ọ bá kù dẹdẹ kí ó dé òde ìsáláyé,  
 Kí ọ la ọkan yòókù mọlẹ.
- 230 Bí igún ti dé bodè ìsáláyé àti ìsálọrun,  
 Tí ọ la àdó kan mọlẹ,

- And said, "King **Àjàláyé** has sent me to greet you.
- 210 With the message that since the day he had  
quarrelled with you,  
The earth has been in confusion.  
Rain has stopped falling.  
King **Àjàláyé** further asks me to express his complete submission to you,  
And that you should not be annoyed.
- 215 He has, from this day, accepted you as his senior".  
With those words, the vulture presented the sacrifice to king **Àjàlórún**.  
Then **Olódùmarè** shook his head continuously.  
for a long time,  
He laughed with a loud noise.  
He then took the vulture to the garden behind his house,
- 220 And asked him to pluck three tiny gourds there.  
He warned him to pluck only the one which remained silent,  
And to avoid that one  
Which asked that he be plucked.  
**Olódùmarè** instructed that as soon as he left the border gate,
- 225 He should break one of the tiny gourds.  
When he got mid-way between earth and heaven,  
He should break another one.  
And when he came very close to the earth,  
He should break the remaining one.
- 230 As soon as the vulture reached the border gate of earth and heaven,  
And broke one of the gourds,

- Ni òjó bá bèrè sí kù girìrì.  
 Gbogbo ayé ní, “Igún dé òhún o”.  
 Nígba tí igún dé idajì isálayé àti isálọrun,
- 235 Tí ọ la èkejì mọlẹ,  
 Ni òjó bá bèrè sí kán.  
 Ni àwọn ẹyẹ bá nsárée lọ tún itẹẹ wọn kọ.  
 Àwọn ẹranko ntún ibùsùun wọn ẹ,  
 Àwọn èyàn nsárée bọ ilée wọn tí ó ti já.
- 240 Ọrán wáá di bí ọ ọ lọ, ọ yà fún mi.  
 Bí igún ti fẹrẹẹ dé òde isálayé,  
 Tí ọ la èkẹta mọlẹ,  
 Ni òjó bá bèrè sí rọ.  
 Kí igún ó tóó fẹsẹ tẹlẹ,
- 245 Ọjó ti rọ, odóó ti kún.  
 Ọjò náàá pọ tó bèẹ gẹẹ,  
 Tí igún ò fi ríran mọná ilée rẹ mọ.  
 Lọ bá nṣwolé onílée káàkiri.  
 Kí ọjò tí nṣpa á bọ látòde ọrun,
- 250 Ọ mọ baà pa á kú.  
 Bọ bá fẹẹ wolé eléylí,  
 Wọn a sọ ọ ní ikó.  
 Bọ bá ní kí òun ọ wolé onítọhún,  
 Wọn a nà án lórógùn lórí.



Rain started to threaten with a loud thunder.  
All the inhabitants of the earth said, "Surely, the  
vulture has reached his destination".  
When the vulture reached half-way between earth  
and heaven,

235 And broke the other tiny gourd,  
Showers of rain started to drop.  
The birds hastened to repair their nests  
While the animals repaired their sleeping places.  
Human beings mended the leaking roofs of their  
houses.

240 Everyone ran helter-skelter for his own immediate  
ends.  
When the vulture approached the earth,  
And broke the third tiny gourd,  
Rain started to fall.  
Before the vulture landed on the earth,

245 Rain had fallen so much that the rivers had become  
full.  
The rain was so heavy  
That the vulture could not find the way to his  
home.  
He therefore started to enter other people's homes  
So that the rain which had been beating him from  
heaven

250 Might not kill him.  
If he attempted to enter one man's house,  
That one would give him a hard knock on the  
head.  
If he attempted to enter another house,  
They would use their **orógùn**<sup>11</sup> wooden object to  
strike him on the head.

- 255 Ninà ànàgbà ọjọ náà,  
 Lọ pá igún lórí dóníolóní.  
 Nígbà tí ẹníkẹni ọ gba igún sílẹ mọ,  
 Lọ bá lọ bà sí orí igi ìrókò,  
 Ọ tàgà bolẹ mbẹ tí tí ilẹẹ fi mọ.
- 260 Kí ilẹ ó tóó mọ,  
 Ebí tí bèrẹ síi pa á.  
 Bí ọjúlẹẹ tí ndá,  
 Tí igún wo wájú,  
 Òkú kan ló rí kakakúkú.
- 265 Lọ bá bèrẹ síi jẹ ẹ,  
 Láímọ pé òkú iyá òun ní.  
 Ní ìgbà tí ilẹẹ mọ dáadáa tán,  
 Tí àwọn ọmọ aráyé rí igún,  
 Ní wọn bá bèrẹ síi kí i káàbọ, káàbọ, káàbọ.
- 270 Igún ní kí wọn ó mọ tii kí òun.  
 Ó ní níbo ní wọn fi iyá òun sí ?  
 Wọn ní, “o ò tii dọrun tí iyáà rẹ fi kùù”,  
 Wọn ní nígbà tí àwọn ọ mọ ibi tí o ó sin ín sí,  
 Tí ó sì ndá òórùn sílẹ,
- 275 Ní àwọn bá wọ ọ sọ sí àtasá kan mbẹun.  
 Ìgbà tí igún débẹ,  
 Tó rí i pé òkú iyá òun ní òun tí jẹ yó,

- 255 It was the repeated beating of that day,  
Which made the vulture's head to become bald  
till this very day.  
When nobody accepted the vulture into his home,  
He went and perched on top of *irókò* tree,<sup>12</sup>  
And covered himself up with his own wings till  
day-break.
- 260 Before day-break,  
The vulture became hungry.  
As day was dawning,  
The vulture looked in front of him,  
And saw one big, swollen corpse,
- 265 And he started to eat it,  
Not knowing that it was his own mother's corpse.  
When day dawned completely,  
And the inhabitants of the earth saw the vulture,  
They started to greet him, "Welcome, welcome,  
welcome".
- 270 But the vulture said that before greeting him,  
They should tell him where they put his mother.  
They said, "You had not reached heaven when  
your mother died,  
And since we did not know where you wanted to  
bury her,  
And she was causing an offensive odour,
- 275 We dragged her corpse into an open space over  
there".  
When the vulture got there,  
And saw that it was his mother's corpse that he  
had eaten up,

Ó ní, “pàkà, àsé báyii layé rí ?”

Ó ní, “òsáá bọsá, ọràá bọrà, ọrẹẹ bọrẹ.

280 Ànàmú ni tọgà,

Itọ tọ bá balẹ,

Kò tún gbọdọ padà wá sẹnu mọ”.

Ó ní, “Láti òní lọ,

Ọmọ tí kò bá tii fẹnu kàn lára iyáa rẹ,

285 Kò níi ẹ ànfààní láéláé”.

Láti ọjọ náà ló ti di wí pé

Kí ọmọ ọ máa múmú láyà iyáa rẹ.

He exclaimed, "What a pity. So, this is what the earth is like !"

He added, "Something that is sold must not be made to look like a present, and a present must be appreciated as a gift."

280 The camelion's power is to draw to himself and take on all colours.

The saliva which drops to the ground,  
Must never again return to the mouth.

From today on,

Any child who has not tasted of his mother,

285 Will never become useful in life".

It was since that day

That children started to suck their mothers' breasts.

## NOTES

1. **Àjàláyé.** Literally meaning “the one who fights on the earth”. It is the nickname of **Ilẹ̀** (Earth). For the Yoruba, the earth is an important divinity and it is worshipped by the **Ògbóni**, an important secret society.
2. **Àjàlórùn.** Literally meaning “the one who fights at **òrùn** (heaven)”. It is the nickname of **Òlódùmarè**, the Yoruba Almighty God.
3. Preservation of a forest for a couple of years until it becomes sufficiently overgrown and has many animals is a common practice in the Yoruba country-side. When the forest has become sufficiently overgrown, it is burnt in the hope that hunters would find animals to kill there.
4. Bush burning in the savanna areas of Yorubaland starts around December, in the height of the dry season, each year and lasts till February of the following year.
5. **Ẹmọ́.** A brown bush rat.
6. Seniority in age is a very important social factor among the Yoruba since the hierarchical system of authority is based on age.
7. Camwood ointment is used by women as an important make-up both for themselves and their children.
8. Falling leaves from trees on the river banks covered up small rivers which had dried up due to lack of rain.
9. **Àkálà.** The ground hornbill.
10. **Ìsálórùn.** Another name for **òrùn** (heaven).

11. **Orógùn.** A wooden object used for turning food like cassava flour or yam-flour pudding inside the pot in order to make the food smooth and edible.
12. **Ìrókò.** The African teak. The tallest and most precious West African hard-wood.

## x. Ifá And the Àjé In Conflict

This poem depicts the state of permanent conflict between the **àjé** and **Ọrúnmìlà**. Apparently, this myth dates back to a time when the physical separation between **ayé** (earth) and **òrun** (heaven) had not taken place. **Ọrúnmìlà**, in company of other **òrìṣà**, was coming from **òrun** to **ayé**, and the **àjé** were also traveling to the same destination. They all met at the border gate separating **ayé** and **òrun**. The **àjé** referred to in the story as the **eleye** (the bird people), were naked. Therefore, when they got to the border gate, they were ashamed of themselves and they could not proceed any further. They therefore begged each of the **òrìṣà** present to give them part of his clothing, but all the **òrìṣà** refused. They then turned to **Ọrúnmìlà** and begged him to mount them on his back until they crossed the bordergate to **ayé**. **Ọrúnmìlà** at first refused but after they had pleaded for long, he agreed to swallow them until they reached **ayé** where they would come out of his stomach again.

When they reached **ayé**, **Ọrúnmìlà** asked the witches to come out of his stomach, but they refused. When **Ọrúnmìlà** told them that if they refused to come out hunger would force them out, they started to bite his liver and intestines. When **Ọrúnmìlà** saw that his life was in great danger, he hastened to complain to his Ifá priests who asked him to perform sacrifice with one big goat, and use its intestines and palm-oil to prepare a special sacrifice for the **àjé** known as **èèsè**. They asked him to carry the sacrifice to the place where he swallowed up the **àjé**. When he got there he did as he was told and the **àjé** started to fly out of his stomach one by one.



When **Ọrúnmìlà** saw that he was rid of the **àjẹ**, he ran into his house and for three months, he never came out for fear that they might come back to attack him. So great was this fear in **Ọrúnmìlà**'s mind that for the whole of the three months, he "lay almost breathless on the floor, hiding himself carefully. " When it became clear that they were not coming back, **Ọrúnmìlà**, rejoiced with his family and friends and sang the song of **Ifá** saying :

"Travellers to **Ìpò**'

Travellers to **Ọfà**;

Only my **Orí** will save me from  
the hands of the witches."

This story emphasizes what has already been mentioned namely, that in their avowed opposition to human beings, the **òrìṣà** and the ancestors, the **àjẹ** would not spare any member of that group whenever there is an opportunity to attack him. Helping the **àjẹ** or doing them a favour does not stop them from their path of eternal opposition to the **òrìṣà** and the human beings. Indeed, it is generally believed that if one knows a witch, one should never help or favour her in any way since this makes her more ruthless in her plans to destroy one.

Since the **àjẹ** represent a negation of all that human beings cherish, and the **òrìṣà** are believed to be helpers and guardians of human beings, one is not surprised that there is such a bitter conflict between the **àjẹ** and the **òrìṣà**. Indeed, conflict and later on resolution, seems to be a permanent feature of the relationship among the Yoruba supernatural powers. An example of this conflict and resolution process has already been demonstrated in the conflict between **ayé** (earth) and **ọrun** (heaven) mentioned in the last poem. The peculiar nature of the conflict between the **àjẹ** and the **òrìṣà**

however, is that the conflict seems to be without any resolution leading inevitably to a state of permanent warfare between these two supernatural powers. It would appear that the **òrìṣà** have no powers at all over the **àjé** so that the latter would therefore belong to a sphere of their own outside the divine and well ordered sphere of the **òrìṣà**. Any man who is therefore threatened by the **àjé** can only appeal to his own **Orí** for support, since the **òrìṣà** cannot guarantee any help in this regard.

The special sacrifice of the **àjé** mentioned in the story is known as **èṣè**. It usually contains the liver and intestines of animals in addition to **ẹ̀kọ** (a pudding made from maize starch) and, of course, palm-oil which is their most favourite food. All these items are believed to represent what the **àjé** like to eat. Any man suffering from an intestinal or liver disease is believed to be under the attack of the **àjé**. **Ẹ̀kọ** and palm-oil are probably included in this list because they are produced mainly by women and are very common food items among the Yoruba. Palm-oil, as already mentioned, is sacred to the **àjé** and it is believed that, when used, it calms down their anger. When used for sacrifice against the **àjé**, palm-oil is believed to be a substitute for the blood of the supplicant. The **àjé** are believed to like sucking blood but if palm-oil is offered to them for sacrifice, they may accept it instead of human blood.

Òòlè lẹ̀ sẹ̀yìn gùnmọ̀lẹ̀  
Bí ẹnì arinmọ̀rìn.  
Bọ́ bá jà kó rìn,  
A dúró sii.

5 A díá fún ọ̀kànlénú 'irúnmọ̀lẹ̀,  
Wọ̀n nítọ̀run bọ́ wáyé.  
A díá fún Èlẹ̀yẹ,  
Èlẹ̀yẹ nítọ̀run bọ́ wáyé.  
A díá fún Eégún

10 Eégún nítọ̀run bọ́ wáyé.  
A díá fún Òòsà,  
Òòsà nítọ̀run bọ́ wáyé.  
A díá fún Ọ̀rúnmilà  
Ọ̀rúnmilà nítikòlẹ̀ ọ̀run bọ́ wá sí tayé.

15 Eégún, Òòsà àti Ọ̀rúnmilà,  
Gbogboo wọ̀n ló rí aṣọ́ bora,  
Şùgbọ̀n ihòdòhò ní àwọ̀n iyàmi wà.  
Nígba tí wọ̀n dé bodè,  
Wọ̀n ò leè lẹ̀ mọ́,

20 Ojú nítì wọ̀n.  
Wọ̀n ní, "Eégún, dákun, yá wa ní díẹ̀  
Níbi aṣọ̀ọ̀ rẹ̀ alárá̀mbarà un,  
Kí á fi díẹ̀ bora m̀bẹ̀ dóde ayé".

- It is the roof of the house which has a hunch on  
the back <sup>1</sup>
- Like a person struggling to walk but who cannot  
walk;
- If he tries hard to walk,  
He stands still again.
- 5 Ifà divination was performed for four hundred  
and one gods <sup>2</sup>
- Who were coming from heaven to the earth.  
Ifà divination was performed for the witches,  
The witches were coming from heaven to the  
earth. <sup>3</sup>
- Ifà divination was performed for **Eégún**,<sup>4</sup>
- 10 **Eégún** was coming from heaven to the earth.  
Ifà divination was performed for **Òòṣà**,<sup>5</sup>  
**Òòṣà** was coming from heaven to the earth.  
Ifà divination was performed for **Ọ̀rúnmilà**,  
**Ọ̀rúnmilà** was coming from the **Ìkòlẹ́** city of heaven  
to its counterpart on the earth.<sup>6</sup>
- 15 The three divinities—**Eégún**, **Òòṣà** and **Ọ̀rúnmilà**  
Were clad in their own robes,  
But the witches were naked.  
When they got to the border gate,<sup>7</sup>  
They could not proceed on their journey any more
- 20 Because they were ashamed of their nakedness.  
They said to **Eégún**, “Please, borrow us some  
Out of your garment of variegated colours,<sup>8</sup>  
So that we may use part of it to cover  
our nakedness on our journey to the earth”.

- Eégún ní, “Ẹ dákun, n ò şerée gbèsè o.”
- 25 Wọn ké sí Òòşà pé,  
 “Dákun, fún wa ní diẹ mbi aşò ọ funfun un,  
 Kí á fi bora délẹ ayé.  
 Òòşá ní, “Ẹ dákun, n ò şerée gbèsè o”.  
 Wọn ké sí Ọrúnmilà pé,
- 30 “Ọrúnmilà, bó ẹ pipọn ọ pọn wá dóde ayé”.  
 Ọrúnmilá ní ẹ ẹ rí i pé  
 Kò sí eegun lára òun.  
 Bí òun bá ti pọn yín,  
 Òun ò ní le rìn mọ.
- 35 Wọn şá bèrẹ síí bẹ Ọrúnmilà,  
 Wọn ní kí Ọrúnmilà ọ dákun, dábò,  
 Kó fiyè dénú,  
 Kó fiyè dékùn,  
 Kó fiyè dé gbogbo ara.
- 40 Nígba tí ẹbẹ pọ lápọjù,  
 Ni Ọrúnmilá bá bi wọn pé  
 “Şé ké ẹ fi dóde ayé náà ni ?  
 Wọn ní, “Bẹẹ ni”.  
 Ni Ọrúnmilá bá ti àşẹ Ẹşù bonu.
- 45 Hàà tí ọ ya ẹnu báyii,  
 Ni àwọn iyámí bá ńrọ ọ sí i.

To which **Eégún** replied, "Please, I beg you, I don't want to play a dangerous game".

- 25 They then turned to **Òòṣà** and said,  
"Please, we beg you, give us part of your white robes

To cover ourselves until we reach the earth".

**Òòṣà** also replied, "Please I beg you, I don't want to play a dangerous game".

They turned to **Ọ́rúnmílà** and said,

- 36 "**Ọ́rúnmílà**, please, mount us on your back until we reach the earth".

But **Ọ́rúnmílà** explained to them that

Since he had no bones in his body system,<sup>9</sup>

If he mounted them on his back,

He would not be able to walk again.

- 35 But they continued to beg **Ọ́rúnmílà**.

They asked **Ọ́rúnmílà** to please, accept their pleadings,

And think of their plight,

To please think of their condition,

And make use of all his thinking faculties to help them out.

- 40 After they had begged **Ọ́rúnmílà** for long,

**Ọ́rúnmílà** asked them saying,

"Is it to carry you from here to the earth that you are pleading for?"

They answered, "Yes".

**Ọ́rúnmílà** therefore put the **àṣẹ**<sup>10</sup> belonging to **Èṣù** in his mouth,

- 45 And opened his mouth wide

So that the witches started to enter therein.

- Lọ bá fi bèbẹ gbé wọn délé ayé.  
 Nígba tí wọn délé ayé tán,  
 Ọrúnmlá ní, “ Ọde ayé náà la dé yí o,
- 50 Ẹ máa wáá sọ o”.  
 Wọn ní kín níní jẹ sísọ kalẹ ?  
 Wọn ní, “A à tún sọ kalẹ mọ,  
 Ibi tí a wà yí náàá dáraà”.  
 Ọrúnmlá ní, “Níbo lọ dára?”
- 55 Ó ní, “Ikùun tẹmi nù un”.  
 Wọn ní ẹe bí àwọn mọ pé ikùn rẹ ni tẹlẹ  
 Kí àwọn ó tóó kó síbẹ.  
 Wọn ní àwọn ọ sá sọ kalẹ mọ ní.  
 Nígba tí ọ pé tí Ọrúnmlá ti ńrọ wọn,
- 60 Tí wọn sá níní àwọn ọ tún sọ kalẹ mọ dandan,  
 Ní Ọrúnmlá bá ní, “Ẹ máa gbébẹ,  
 Ebi ní ó kùúkù lée yín sọ kalẹ”.  
 Wọn ní, “Kín níní jébi ?  
 Ifun àti ẹdọdọ rẹ yí náàá tó wáá jẹ”.
- 65 Ní wọn bá ńjá Ọrúnmláá jẹ pátípátí.  
 Ní Ọrúnmlá bá họ.  
 Lọ bá gbọ̀nà oko aláwo lọ.  
 Ó ní báwo loore tí òún ẹe  
 Ọ ẹe níní pa òun báylí ?

- And that was how he carried them to the earth.  
 When they arrived on the earth,  
 Ọ́rúnmílà said, "We are now on the earth,
- 50 All of you come out".  
 But they said, "What do you mean by that?"  
 They said, "We are not coming out at all,  
 This place is good enough for us".  
 Ọ́rúnmílà retorted, "Which place is good enough  
 for you?"
- 55 He added, "That is my own stomach."  
 To which they replied that they knew that it was  
 his stomach  
 Before they entered therein.  
 They bluntly refused to come out.  
 After Ọ́rúnmílà had pleaded with them for long,
- 60 And they maintained that they would not come  
 out,  
 Ọ́rúnmílà told them, "Alright, stay there,  
 I am sure that hunger will soon drive you out".  
 But they answered, "What do you mean by hun-  
 ger ?  
 These your intestines and liver are sufficient  
 food for us".
- 65 They then started to bite Ọ́rúnmílà.  
 Ọ́rúnmílà took to his heels,  
 And ran to the home of an Ifá priest.  
 He asked how the help which he rendered (to the  
 witches)  
 Would not lead to his death.



- 70 Wọn ní kí ọ lọọ rú ewúré kan.  
 Ní wọn bá fi ifuun rẹ pèèsè  
 Pèlú ọpọlọpọ ẹkọ àti epo.  
 Wọn kó gbogboo rẹ sínú agbada nílá kan.  
 Wọn ní kí Ọrúnmilà ọ máa ru èèsè nàà lọ
- 75 Sí ibi tí ọ ti gbé àwọn Ẹlẹyẹ mì.  
 Wọn ní bộ bá gbé èèsè nàà kalẹ tán,  
 Kí ọ máa ya ẹnuu rẹ,  
 Kí ọ máa wí pé,  
 “Hàà, ẹ jáde;
- 80 Hàà, ẹ jáde.”  
 Aré ikú nì Ọrúnmilà sá débi  
 Tí ọ ti gbé àwọn Ẹlẹyẹ mì.  
 Bí ọ ti débẹ, tí ọ nṣe,  
 “Hàà, ẹ jáde;
- 85 Hàà, ẹ jáde,”  
 Ní àwọn Ẹlẹyẹ bá nífòó jáde lẹkọ̀ọkan.  
 Nígba tí Ọrúnmilà rí i wí pé  
 Wọn ti jáde tán nínú òun,  
 Ó tún fi ọwọ tẹ ikùn wò,
- 90 Ó rí i pé wọn ti tán pátá poo,  
 Ní Ọrúnmilà bá sí filà,  
 Lọ bá họ.

- 70 He was asked to go and offer a goat as sacrifice.  
 They used its intestines to prepare èèsè<sup>11</sup> sacrifice  
 Together with plenty of èkọ and palm-oil.<sup>12</sup>  
 They put everything inside a large broken pot,<sup>13</sup>  
 And asked Ọrúnmílà to carry it
- 75 To the place where he swallowed up the witches.  
 They told him that after putting down the sacrifice,  
 He should open his mouth,  
 And say the following words:  
 “Hàà, come out,
- 80 “Hàà, come out”.  
 Ọrúnmílà ran like someone being pursued by  
 death to the place  
 Where he swallowed up the witches.  
 As soon as he got there and he started saying,  
 “Hàà, come out,
- 85 Hàà, come out”,  
 The witches started to fly out one by one.  
 When Ọrúnmílà noticed that  
 They had all left his tommy,  
 He used his hands to press his stomach,
- 90 And re-assured himself that they had all left,  
 He took off his cap,  
 And ran away.

- Aré tó sá wọ yàráa rẹ báylí,  
 Oşù mēta, kò tún jáde síta mọ.  
 95 Tí ọ sá lẹkẹkẹ mọlẹ,  
 Tí ọ ba búúbúú.  
 Íjó ní íjó,  
 Ayọ ní íyọ.  
 Ó ñyin àwọn awoo rẹ,  
 100 Àwọn awoo rẹ ñyin 'Fá.  
 Agogo ní Ípóró,  
 Àràn ní Ìkìjà,  
 Ọpá kugúkugù lójúde Ìşerimogbe.  
 Ó ya ẹnu kótó,  
 105 Orin awo lọ bọ sí i lẹnu.  
 Ẹsẹ tí ọ nà,  
 Íjó fà á.  
 Ó ní bẹẹ gégé  
 Ní àwọn awo òún nşẹnu rereé pe 'Fá.  
 110 Òòlẹ́ lọ şẹ̀yìn gùnmọ̀lẹ́  
 Bí-ẹni arìnmọ̀rìn.  
 Bọ bá jà kó rìn,  
 A dúró sii.  
 A díá fún ọkànlénú irúnmọlẹ,  
 115 Wọn ntọrun bọ wáyé.

- He ran into his bed-room,  
And for three months, he did not come out.
- 95 He lay almost breathless on the floor  
Hiding himself carefully.  
He started to dance,  
He started to rejoice.  
He praised his Ifá priests,
- 100 And his Ifá priests praised Ifá.  
Gongs were beaten at **Ìpóró**;  
**Àràn** drum was beaten at **Ìkijà**;  
Sticks were used in making melodious music at  
**Ìṣẹrimogbe**.  
As he opened his mouth,
- 105 The song of Ifá entered therein.  
As he stretched his legs forward,  
Dance caught them.  
He said that was exactly  
How his Ifá priests employed their good voices in  
praise of Ifá.
- 110 It is the roof of the house which has a hunch on  
the back  
Like a person struggling to walk but who cannot  
walk;  
If he tries hard to walk,  
He stands still again.  
Ifá divination was performed for four hundred  
and one gods
- 115 Who were coming from heaven to the earth.

A díá fún Èlẹyẹ,  
Èlẹyẹ ntọrun bọ wáyé.  
A díá fún Eégún,  
Eégún ntọrun bọ wáyé.

120 A díá fún Òòsà,  
Òòsà ntọrun bọ wáyé.  
A díá fún Ọrúnmilà,  
Ọrúnmilà ntíkòlé ọrun bọ wá sí tayé.  
Èròò 'Po,

125 Èrò Ọfà,  
Orí mi ní ọ gbà mí lẹwọ Èlẹyẹ.

Ifá divination was performed for the witches,  
The witches were coming from heaven to the earth.  
Ifá divination was performed for Eégún,  
Eégún was coming from heaven to the earth.

- 120 Ifá divination was performed for Òṣà,  
Òṣà was coming from heaven to the earth.  
Ifá divination was performed for Òrúnmìlà,  
Òrúnmìlà was coming from heaven to the earth.  
Travellers to Ìpò,

- 125 Travellers to Òfà,  
Only my Orí will save me from the hands of the  
witches.

## NOTES

1. This refers to the roof of a thatch-roofed house.
2. This is traditionally the number of gods believed to be in the Yoruba pantheon.
3. It is believed that the witches came from heaven to the earth with the power to destroy human beings and their handiwork. This power was given to them by **Olódùmarè** himself and that is why human beings find it so difficult to overcome the menace of the witches.
4. **Eégún** is a shortened form of **Egúngún**, the Yoruba ancestor god.
5. **Òṣà** is a shortened form of **Òrisha** which ordinarily means divinity or god but here it refers to **Òrishańlá**, the creation god who is also known as **Ọbàtálá**.
6. **Ìkọlé** is the name of an **Èkítì** town. It is believed that there is another city in heaven which bears the same name.
7. Yoruba mythology recognises a time when heaven and earth formed part of the same territory and were separated only by a border gate watched by a lonesome gate-keeper.
8. **Egúngún** usually wears a costume of variegated colours containing very costly cloths such as velvet.
9. It is believed that **Ọrúnmìlà** had no bones at all in his body system.
10. **Àṣẹ** is believed to be the divine power with which the gods performed supernatural deeds. This power is kept by **Èṣù**, the trickster god, for the use of all the **òrisha**. Whenever **Ọrúnmìlà** or any other god wanted to perform any supernatural

deeds, they had to consult **Èṣù** to borrow this divine and highly potent power.

11. **Èṣè** is a type of sacrifice specially made for the witches. It contains animal intestines and liver as well as palm-oil.
12. Palm-oil is believed to be one of the foods the witches like most.
13. Most sacrifices are placed inside broken pots or calabashes. In the case of the special sacrifice of the witches, it is usually placed inside a broken pot



## xi. The **Òrìṣà** and the **Àjé** In Conflict

The following poem is another example of conflict between the **àjé** and the divinities. This time the conflict involves **Òṣàálá** (the Creation divinity), **Orò** and **Eégún** (the twin divinities from the cults of which women are barred) as well as **Ọ́rúnmìlà** himself. The conflict was caused by **Yemòó**, the wife of **Òṣàálá**, when she went to draw water from the river of the **àjé** and spoiled the water for them after drawing her own share.

When the **àjé** came the following day to draw water, they saw that it had been spoiled. They asked **ẹ̀luùlú** who watched the river for them what happened in their absence, and that bird revealed that it was **Yemòó** who spoiled the water. They therefore went to report the matter to **Òṣàálá**, **Yemòó**'s husband. But when **Òṣàálá** insisted that his wife did nothing wrong, they swallowed him and his wife.

**Eégún** (the ancestor god) and **Orò** who wanted to help **Òṣàálá** and his wife were both swallowed up as well. When **Ọ́rúnmìlà** learnt of the incident, he consulted his divination instruments and he was told to perform sacrifice with **ẹ̀kuru** (a food made with ground and cooked beans, palm-oil and other condiments) and **àtẹ̀** (a type of resin used in catching birds). The sacrifice was placed at the main-door and the back-door entrance to **Ọ́rúnmìlà**'s house, and the **àtẹ̀** was poured around the sacrifice.

Before long, the **àjé** appeared apparently in the shape of birds flying towards **Ọ́rúnmìlà**'s house. When he saw them, he ran into the house to hide himself. But as soon as they got to the spot where the sacrifice was kept and saw the plates of **ẹ̀kuru**, they forgot about **Ọ́rúnmìlà** whom they had come to attack.

They started eating the **èkuru** and in the process, they soiled their wings and bodies with the gummy **àtè**. When **Òrúnmìlà** saw that they had been completely soiled with the **àtè**, he took a club, came out of his hiding place, and killed all of them. Thus, we see that, this time, the conflict ended in victory rather than defeat for **Òrúnmìlà**.

The first important point that we see in this story is that, this time, the **òrìṣà** seemed to have been responsible for the attack of the **àjé** when **Yemòó**, the wife of **Òòṣàálá**, went into the river of the **àjé** and not only drew water from it but spoiled the water after taking her own portion. This act of cruelty was what actually provoked the **àjé** to attack the **òrìṣà** but despite the fact that their case was just, they lost the fight in the end.

Secondly, we see **Eégún** (the ancestor god) and **Orò** mentioned for the first time in conflict with the **àjé**. This is very interesting because the cults of these two divinities do not admit women. In fact, it seems that these two divinities started as a means of curbing the powers of women and cleansing society of the menace of the **àjé**. There is no doubt at all that both **Eégún** and **Orò** were, and to some extent still are, directed towards terrorizing women as a means of keeping their powers in check. During **Orò** festivals for example, women are barred from coming out of the house while the **Orò** roared through the streets of the city both day and night. The conflict between the **àjé** and these two divinities should therefore be very intense. There are several poems of **Ifá** which depict this bitter struggle between these two opposing powers.

Thirdly, we see the part played by **Òrúnmìlà** in freeing the other captured divinities and destroying

the àjé. The secret of Ọrúnmìlà's success rested in his knowledge of divination so that he could be told of what would happen and how to prepare for it. This therefore underlines the importance of Ọrúnmìlà in the Yoruba pantheon. He acts as spokesman, leader and protagonist of the other divinities because of his knowledge of divination. But his power in this regard is not absolute since he still depends for example on Èṣù who keeps the divine power known as àṣẹ which enables the divinities to perform supernatural deeds. Nevertheless, the importance of Ọrúnmìlà as the spokesman and "public-relations officer" for the other divinities is quite clear and it is probably because of this unique position that the àjé attack him frequently.

- Pánkéré jígíní,  
Awo inúú 'gbó.  
A díá fún Yemòó,  
Tíí sẹ obínrin Òòsà,
- 5 Nìjọ tí ó lọ lẹẹ ọ̀nḡdò Èlẹyẹ.  
Èlẹ̀rùn lọ yán  
Ní omí dọ̀wọ̀n.  
Nígba tí wọ̀n ò rí omi mu mọ́,  
Àwọ̀n èyàń gbẹ̀ odòò tí wọ̀n sọ̀tò,
- 10 Àwọ̀n Èlẹyẹ nááá sì gbẹ̀ tí wọ̀n sọ̀tò.  
Àwọ̀n Èlẹyẹ fí èlùlú sọ̀ odòò tí wọ̀n.  
Wọ̀n ní kí ó mú ẹ̀nikẹ̀nì tí ọ̀ bá rí nìbẹ̀.  
Ìgbà tí odòò tí àwọ̀n èyàń gbẹ̀,  
Ní Yemòó bá lọ sí odò àwọ̀n Èlẹyẹ.
- 15 Ó sì n̄sẹ̀ àlẹjò lọwọ́ nì.  
Ìgbà tí ọ̀ ọ̀nḡmì tán,  
Lọ́ bá fí aṣọ̀ òḡḡe rẹ̀ táábà sí iyókù.  
Èlùlú rí i,  
Kọ̀ fọ̀hùn.
- 20 Ìgbà ilẹ́ẹ̀ mọ́,  
Ní àwọ̀n iyámí bá wáá ọ̀nḡmì lódò.  
Wọ̀n bá ojú omi ní pípọ̀n sẹ̀sẹ̀.  
Wọ̀n bí Èlùlú pé ta lọ ọ̀nḡmì.

The small **pánkéré** climbing stem,  
Ifá priest of the forest,  
Performed Ifá divination for **Yemòó,**<sup>2</sup>  
The wife of **Òòṣà,**

- 5 On the day she was going to draw water from the  
river of the witches.

The dry season was very severe,  
And, as a result, water became scarce.  
When there was no more water to drink,  
The human beings made their own pool of water  
separately,

- 10 And the witches also made their own pool of  
water separately.

The witches appointed **Ẹluùlú** to watch over  
their river,  
And instructed him to arrest anybody he saw there.  
But when the river of the human beings dried up,  
**Yemòó** was forced to go to the river of the witches.

- 15 She was at that time having her monthly menstrual  
period.

When she finished drawing water,  
She used her menstrual pad to wash her private  
part into the water.

**Ẹluùlú** saw her,  
But he did not say anything.

- 20 When day dawned,  
The witches came to the river to draw water,  
And they found the surface of the water very red.  
They asked from **Ẹluùlú** who drew water from the  
river.

- Èluùlú ní, “Yemòó lọ pọnmí tán,
- 25 Lẹjẹ ńrú tùú tùú tùú.”  
 Wọn ní, “Ọ sá araa rẹ lógbẹ ní?”  
 Ó ní, “Kọ sá araa rẹ lógbẹ,  
 Èjẹ idii rẹ niì.”  
 Ní wọn bá kọrí sílé Ọòsà.
- 30 Wọn mú èhurù, ẹyẹ wọn, lọwọ.  
 Wọn ní, “Ọòsà, wohun tí Yemòó ẹe o.”  
 Ọòsà ní obìnrin òun ò ẹe ohuùn kan.  
 Ní èhurù, ẹyẹ wọn, bá fọn fẹrẹ,  
 Ó ní, “Àti Yemòó, àti Ọòsà,
- 35 Àhemì, àhemì, àhemì.”  
 Ní wọn bá he Yemòó àti Ọòsàálá mì.  
 Ní Eégún bá jáde sí wọn pẹlú àtòrì lọwọ.  
 Èhurúú ní, “TEégún, tỌòsà,  
 Àhemì, àhemì, àhemì,”
- 40 Ní wọn bá he Eégún mì.  
 Ní Orò bá bộ síta,  
 Pé kí òun ó gbé wọn.  
 Èhurúú ní, “ÀtEégún, àtOrò,  
 Àhemì, àhemì, àhemì.”
- 45 Ní wọn bá he Orò náà mì.  
 Láìpẹ, Ọrúnmilà gbọ,

25 **Èluùlú** said, “After **Yemòó** finished drawing water,  
Blood started to gush out profusely”.

The witches asked, “Did she stab herself?”

And he replied, “She did not stab herself,

The blood was from her private part”.

The witches therefore went to **Òòşà**’s house,

30 And they took **èhurù**, their bird, along.

They said, “**Òòşà**, see what **Yemòó** has done.”

But **Òòşà** said that his wife did nothing.

**Èhurù**, the bird of the witches, therefore, blew his  
whistle,

And said, “Both **Yemòó** and **Òòşà**

35 Should be swallowed up immediately.

They (the witches) therefore swallowed both of  
them.

**Eégún** came out, whip in hand,<sup>5</sup> (to revenge).

But **Èhurù** said again, “Both **Eégún** and **Òòşà**  
Should be swallowed up immediately”.

40 They therefore swallowed up **Eégún**.

**Orò**<sup>6</sup> (saw this and) came out

In order to capture them.

But **Èhurù** said again, “Both **Eégún** and **Orò**

Should be swallowed up immediately”.

45 The result was that they swallowed up **Orò** as well.

Before long, **Òrúnmilà** learnt (of the incident).

- Lọ bá gbé òkè ipòrìí rẹ kalẹ.  
Wọn ní kí Ọrúnmilá ó rú àwo èkuru kan àti àtẹ.  
Ní àwọn awo ilé Ọrúnmilá bá ẹ Ifá fún un.
- 50 Wọn fi èkuru náà pèèsè.  
Wọn gbé àwo kan sí ojú ilé,  
Wọn sì gbé ọkan sí ejétù.  
Wọn wáá da àtẹ sílẹ yíká àwo èkuru náà.  
Láìpẹ, àwọn Èlẹyẹ yọ ní ọ̀dọkán.
- 55 Wọn nífò fẹrẹẹ bọ.  
Nígbà tí Ọrúnmilá rí wọn,  
Lọ bá sáré, wọlé,  
Ọ gọ mọlẹ.  
Bí àwọn Èlẹyẹ tí dé ilé Ọrúnmilá,
- 60 Àtẹ èyí tí ó gbojúu 'lé,  
Àtẹ èyí tí ọ gbọ̀nà èbùú,  
Kítí ní wọn kan àwo èkuu nílẹ.  
Sé àwọn Èlẹyẹ ọ̀ sì gbọ̀dọ fi ojú kan èkuru.  
Ní wọn bá bèrẹ síi jẹ ẹ.
- 65 Wọn jẹ jẹẹ jẹ,  
Wọn fi ẹ ikùn gbentọ,  
Wọn ọ̀ tiẹ rántí Ọrúnmilá  
Tí wọn nílọ sílẹ rẹ mọ.  
Nígbà tí Ọrúnmilá rí i pé onjẹ náàá wọ wọn lára  
tán,



- And he got hold of his Ifá divination instruments.  
**Ọrúnmílà** was asked to perform sacrifice with one  
 plate of **èkuru** and some quantity of **àtè**.<sup>8</sup>  
 The resident Ifá priests of **Ọrúnmílà**'s household  
 performed divination for him.
- 50 They used the **èkuru** to prepare **èèsè**.<sup>9</sup>  
 They placed one plate (of **èkuru**) on the main en-  
 trance to the house,  
 And placed another plate on **ejétù**.<sup>10</sup>  
 They poured **àtè** all over the floor around the plates  
 of **èkuru**.  
 Before long, the witches appeared,
- 55 Moving quickly in great joy.  
 When **Ọrúnmílà** saw them,  
 He ran into the house,  
 And hid himself carefully on the floor.  
 As soon as the witches got to **Ọrúnmílà**'s house,
- 60 All of them, including those who took the front  
 door,  
 And those who took the back door,  
 Found the plates of **èkuru** on the floor.  
 And the witches are very fond of **èkuru**.  
 They therefore started to eat it.
- 65 They ate and ate and ate  
 Until their bellies became heavy and protruding,  
 And they forgot about **Ọrúnmílà**  
 Into whose house they were going.  
 When **Ọrúnmílà** noticed that their attention was  
 completely absorbed in the food,

- 70 Tó ri i pé wọn ti fapá àti ẹsẹ yí àtẹ dádáá,  
 Ló bá bọ sínú ilé,  
 Ó mú kùmò lówó,  
 Ló bá jáde sí wọn.  
 Bẹẹ ni Ọrúnmilá ẹ lu gbogboo wọn pa.
- 75 Àti Ẹlẹyẹ ni o,  
 Àti ẹhurù ẹyẹ burúkú tí wọn mú lówó,  
 Gbogbo wọn ni Ọrúnmilá lù pa.  
 Ijó ni Ọrúnmilá wáà ñjọ,  
 Ayọ ní ñyọ.
- 80 Ó ñyin àwọn awoo rẹ,  
 Àwọn awoo rẹ ñyin 'Fá.  
 Agogo ní Ìpóró,  
 Àràn nÍkijà,  
 Ọpá kugúkugù lójúde Ìṣẹrimogbe.
- 85 Wọn sọpá sáràn,  
 Ó mú tinùu rẹ jáde.  
 Ó ya ẹnu kótó,  
 Orin awo ní ñkọ.  
 Ẹsẹ tí ó nà,
- 90 Ijó fà á.  
 Ó ní bẹẹ gégé,  
 Ni àwọn awo òún wí.

- 70 And that their bodies and feet were completely  
soaked in the **àtè**,  
He went inside the room,  
Took out a heavy wooden club,  
And came out to meet them,  
And started to beat all of them.
- 75 All the witches  
And **ẹhurù**, their bird, with whom they came,  
Were beaten to death by **Ọrúnmìlà**.  
**Ọrúnmìlà** started to dance,  
He started to rejoice.
- 80 He praised his Ifá priests,  
And his Ifá priests praised Ifá.  
Gongs were beaten at **Ìpóró**,  
**Àràn** was beaten at **Ìkijà**,  
Sticks were employed to produce melodious music  
at **Ìṣẹrimogbe**.
- 85 They applied drum-stick to **àràn**,  
And it brought fourth its pleasant melodies.  
He (**Ọrúnmìlà**) opened his mouth a little,  
And started to sing the song of Ifá priests.  
As he stretched out his feet,
- 90 Dance caught them.  
He said that was exactly  
What his Ifá priests predicted.

Páńkéré jíńíní,  
Awo ínúu 'gbó.

95 A díá fún Yemòó,  
Tíí ẹ̀ obínrín Òòşà,  
Níjọ tí ó lọ lèé pòndò Ẹ̀lẹ̀yẹ.  
Èròò 'Po,  
Èrò Òfà,

100 Orí mí ní ó gbà mí lọwọ Ẹ̀lẹ̀yẹ.

The small **pánkéré** climbing stem,  
Ifá priest of the forest,

- 95 Performed Ifá divination for **Yemòó**  
Who was the wife of **Òòṣà**,  
On the day she was going to draw water from the  
river of the witches.  
Travellers to **Ìpò**,  
Travellers to **Òfà**,

- 100 Only my **Orí** will deliver me from the hands of the  
witches.

## NOTES

1. **Pánkéré.** A slender climbing stem found in big forests.
2. **Yemòó.** A mythical figure believed to be the wife of **Òḡṣàálá**, the god of creation.
3. **Ẹ̀luùlú.** A bird of the savanna region of West Africa. It is sluggish and feeds mainly on insects.
4. **Ẹ̀hurù.** A mythical bird believed to be the bird of the witches. The witches are also believed to have the power to change themselves into **ẹ̀hurù** whenever they wanted to fly to some places urgently. Indeed, the word used for 'witch' in this poem is **ẹ̀lẹ̀yẹ̀** which means "people of the bird".
5. The whip is one of the most important instruments sacred to **Egúngún**, the Yoruba ancestor god. The whip is made out of a carved and decorated stem of **àtòrì**, a tough West African wood which grows many tiny and tall branches.
6. **Orò.** An important Yoruba god. Its cult and secrets are completely closed to women who are forbidden to go outdoors during the annual **Orò** festivals which usually last for at least seven days. At **Abẹ̀òkúta** and **Ìsẹ̀yìn**, the **Orò** cult is very important and its members (especially at **Abẹ̀òkúta**) perform important political functions.
7. **Ẹ̀kuru.** A food made out of marshed, cooked beans and condiments.
8. **Àtẹ̀.** A type of gum or resin used for catching birds
9. **Ẹ̀èsè.** A special sacrifice for the witches.
10. **Ẹ̀jẹ̀tù.** An entrance at the back of the house through which water flows out from the open, uncovered bath-room which is also called by the same name.

## xii. A Mysterious Friend of Ọ̀rúnmilà Threatened His Home In His Absence.

This poem depicts conflict of a different nature. This time the conflict is between two friends — Ọ̀rúnmilà and Ọ̀rọ̀ Hù̀nùhù̀nù. The name Ọ̀rọ̀ literally means 'fairy' and it is used to refer to the lesser supernatural forces or spirits who are believed to dwell in rivers, trees (for example the Ịrókò tree), rocks, caves, hills and mountains. They are believed to be more or less neutral forces in the eternal conflict between the human beings and the *ajogun*. They could be malevolent or benevolent to man depending on the circumstances. Since some of these lesser supernatural forces are not physically well-formed (for example, some of them are believed to have one eye, one leg, two heads etc), they do not like being ridiculed because of their physical malformation, and any attempt to ridicule them usually leads to violence.

In the story below, Ọ̀rọ̀, a good friend of Ọ̀rúnmilà and his family became annoyed when he was ridiculed and laughed at because of his funny and strange ways, although it would appear that he provoked the inhabitants of Ọ̀rúnmilà's house into laughter. However, when Ọ̀rọ̀ noticed that the people of Ọ̀rúnmilà's house were completely absorbed in the laughter and amusement, he dropped some poisonous medicine on the floor and the result was instant trouble for all of them. Some people were afflicted with stomach-aches, and some with cold while others were suffering from epilepsy and mental disorder.

All these happened during Ọ̀rúnmilà's absence from home. But he suspected that something had happened when he slept and his sleep was disturbed. He therefore

consulted his Ifá divination instruments and he was told to return home immediately. When he got home and found his home “upside down”, he asked if anybody visited his home in his absence, and he was told of Ọ̀rọ̀'s visit. Ọ̀rúnmilà then went to Ọ̀rọ̀ and a long dialogue, rendered in poetic form, ensued between the two of them. In the dialogue, Ọ̀rúnmilà said that he should be held responsible for the ridicule and shame to which his strange friend had been exposed. After a long time of fervent pleading, Ọ̀rọ̀ at last accepted Ọ̀rúnmilà's apology, and he took some sand from the ground, gave it to Ọ̀rúnmilà, and instructed him to sprinkle it on his people. When Ọ̀rúnmilà did as he was ordered, his people became well again.

The first thing that we notice in this story is that the conflict between Ọ̀rúnmilà and his mysterious friend was caused by deliberate provocation on the part of Ọ̀rọ̀. It would then appear that these minor supernatural powers could deliberately behave in a funny and strange manner in order to provoke human beings to laugh at their funny ways or their physical malformation. There are many stories of this kind recorded in oral prose. In traditional society, therefore, every child is taught from childhood never to laugh at or ridicule any strange man whose behaviour differs from the accepted norm of the community. This is done to avoid the type of friction reported in this story.

Secondly, in this story, we see the great belief of the Yoruba in the powers of traditional medicine. To the Yoruba mind, there is nothing which medicine cannot accomplish. Hence Ọ̀rọ̀ caused all the trouble reported in the story for members of Ọ̀rúnmilà's household by dropping some medicine on the ground apparently in the compound where they were living. There is no report



of physical contact of the afflicted persons with the medicine. The cure to the afflictions seems also strange. It consisted simply of sand taken on the spot where the conversation between **Ọrúnmilà** and **Ọrọ** took place. These materials may look strange as potent medical preparations to people of a Western background, but to the Yoruba they are not unbelievable at all. While the claims of some African practitioners of traditional medicine may appear fantastic, it is necessary for present-day scholars of African thought to study African folk medicine more seriously instead of simply characterising it as 'primitive' or 'native' medicine. There can certainly be no doubt that African traditional medicine is much more potent and advanced than we have always been told by practitioners of Western medicine.

- Arọ abọwọ pónpó,  
 Arọ abẹsẹ pónpó.  
 A díá fún Ọrúnmilà,  
 Nígba tí òun Ọrọ-hùnhùnú jọ nṣọrẹ.
- 5 Wọn ní kí ọ káakí Mọlẹ,  
 Ọ jàrẹ,  
 Ebo ní ọ ẹ.  
 Ọ pawo lékèé,  
 Ọ pÈṣù lólè,
- 10 Ọ wòrun yàn yààn yàn,  
 Bí ẹnì tí ọ níí kú mọ láyẹ,  
 Ọ wáá kọtí ọgbọin sẹbo.  
 Bí Ọrọ bá tí dé,  
 Ọrúnmilà a ní kí wọn ọ tẹní fún un,
- 15 Kí wọn ọ múlẹ pọntí,  
 Kí wọn ọ mọ̀nà rokà,  
 Kí wọn ọ fi gbogbo agbada dínran.  
 Nígba tí ọ yá,  
 Ọrúnmilà wáá sawo lọ sí àpá òkun, ilàjì ọsà.
- 20 Ó sì sọ fún Ọrọ, ọrẹẹ rẹ,  
 Kí ọ tóó lọ.  
 Nígba tí Ọrọ rí i pé

The cripple with short arms,  
The cripple with short legs,  
Performed Ifá divination for **Ọrúnmìlà**  
When he and **Ọrọ̀-hùnúhùnú'** were friends.

- 5 He was told to take care of **Mọ̀lẹ̀**,  
He was told that he would do well  
If he performed sacrifice.  
He took his Ifá priests to be liars.  
He took **Ẹ̀ṣù** to be a thief.
- 10 He looked fearfully towards heaven,  
Like a person who would never die.  
He turned a deaf ear to the warnings of his Ifá  
priests that he should perform sacrifice.  
Whenever **Ọrọ̀** came to him ,  
**Ọrúnmìlà** would order someone to spread a mat  
for him.
- 15 He would ask his people to fill the house with wine,  
To fill the streets with **ọ̀kà**,<sup>2</sup>  
And to use all available pots to fry meat.  
After some time,  
**Ọrúnmìlà** went on a divination trip to the end of  
the sea, mid-way on the lagoon.
- 20 And he told **Ọrọ̀** his friend  
Before he left.  
When **Ọrọ̀** noticed that

Ọrúnmílá tí lọ jìná dáádáa tán,  
Lọ bá gbéra ní ilée rẹ,

- 25 Ó di ilé Ọrúnmílà.  
Bí ó tí yọ níta,  
Ó bèrẹ síí wa itọ lẹnu,  
Ó dẹ ètè sílẹ.  
Ó fọnkun lémú,
- 30 Ó fi ẹrẹ pa gbogbo ara.  
Ó wọ òdì ẹwù,  
Ó ntẹlẹ bí onídánpára.  
Ó sá bèrẹ síí ẹ gbogbo nńkan  
Tí ó lẹ mú èyàn rín ẹrín.
- 35 Bí àwọn ará ilé Ọrúnmílá tí rí i,  
Wọn bèrẹ síí rín ẹrín.  
Wọn ńdọkọkọ,  
Wọn sì ńrọ luraa wọn.  
Nígbà tí Ọrọ rí i pé  
Ẹrín náàá wọ wọn lára tán,  
Títú tó tú àpò,  
Àdó burúkú ló mú jáde,  
Lọ bá da òògùn sílẹ,  
Ó sì bá tiẹ lọ.
- 40 Kòì tii rín jìná

Òrúnmìlà had gone far away from home,  
He left his own home

- 25 For Òrúnmìlà's house.  
As soon as he appeared outside the house,  
He started to vomit saliva through his mouth;  
And he opened his mouth carelessly with his lips  
hanging downwards;  
He had mucus dripping through his nostrils;
- 30 He also rubbed his body with mud.  
He wore his garment wrongly with the inner side  
out,  
And he was walking along unsteadily like someone  
afflicted by *dánpára*.<sup>3</sup>  
He started to do all those things  
Which could make one burst into laughter.
- 35 As soon as the inmates of the house of Òrúnmìlà  
saw him,  
They started to laugh,  
And they were crowing like a cock.  
They were falling on each other in amusement.  
When Òrò noticed that
- 40 They were well absorbed in the laughter,  
He opened his bag,  
And brought out his evil medicine gourd.  
He sprinkled the ground with medicine,  
And went on his way.
- 45 He had not travelled very far

Tí gbogbo ilé Ọ̀rúnmilá fí dàrú.  
Èlòmíràn nkú wáápá,  
Èlòmíràn nsínwín,  
Èlòmíràn nṣe bí aláko aágànná,

- 50 Inú nrun èlòmíràn,  
Orí nfọ èlòmíràn.  
Òtútù ọ̀ jẹ́ kí èlòmíràn ọ̀ gbádùn.  
Ikú wáá fí ilé Ọ̀rúnmilá ẹ̀ ọ̀de,  
Àrún fí ilée rẹ̀ ẹ̀ ọ̀dẹ̀dẹ̀.
- 55 Nígba tí Ọ̀rúnmilá dé ibi tí nlọ̀,  
Ó sùn, oorun rẹ̀ ọ̀ dọgba.  
Ni Ọ̀rúnmilá bá gbé òkè ipòrí araa rẹ̀ kalẹ̀.  
Ifá ní kí Ọ̀rúnmilá ó padà sílé lésẹ̀kẹ̀sẹ̀  
Nítorí pé ilée rẹ̀ ẹ̀ tí dàrú.
- 60 Ni Ọ̀rúnmilá bá tí àṣẹ̀ Èṣù bonu,  
Lọ̀ bá gbéra nlẹ̀,  
Ó di atégùn,  
Ó kọ́rí sí ilé.  
Nígba tó délé,
- 65 Ọ̀ bá ilée rẹ̀ lódikondì.  
Lọ̀ bá bèèrè pé  
Ta ló wọlé òun

- When Ọrúnmìlà's home was thrown into confusion.  
 Some people were afflicted by epilepsy,  
 While some suffered from neurotic complaints,  
 And some were behaving like mad men.
- 50 Some people had stomach-aches,  
 And some had head-aches.  
 Some of the inmates suffered from severe cold.  
 Death pitched its camp outside Ọrúnmìlà's house,  
 While disease pitched its own camp inside his home.
- 55 When Ọrúnmìlà arrived at his destination,  
 He slept, but he did not enjoy his sleep.  
 He therefore brought out his divination instruments.  
 And Ifá told him to return home immediately  
 Because his home was in great peril.
- 60 Ọrúnmìlà therefore put Èṣù's àṣẹ in the mouth,  
 And he got up in haste,  
 And turned himself into wind.  
 When he got home,
- 65 He found his home upside down.  
 And he asked (from the inmates)  
 Who entered the house

Nígbà tí òun ò sí nílẹ̀ ?  
Àwọn ará ilẹ́ rẹ̀ẹ̀ sì dáhùn pé Ọ̀rọ̀ nì.

- 70 Ní Ọ̀rúnmlá bá múra,  
Ó di ilẹ́ Ọ̀rọ̀-hùnnùhùnù, ọ̀rẹ̀ẹ̀ rẹ̀.  
Nígbà tí ó fojú kan Ọ̀rọ̀,  
Lọ́ bá mẹ̀kún,  
Ó fi dígbẹ̀,
- 75 Ó fi iyẹ̀rẹ̀ ọ̀hùn arò,  
Awo èé sunkún ipín làlúú já.  
Ó ní bẹ̀ẹ̀ gẹ̀gẹ̀  
Ní awo òún wí :  
“Arọ̀ abọ̀wọ̀ pónpó,
- 80 Arọ̀ abẹ̀şẹ̀ pónpó,  
A díá fún Ọ̀rúnmlá,  
Nígbà tí òun Ọ̀rọ̀-hùnnùhùnù jọ nşọ̀rẹ̀.  
Wọn ní ọ̀ káakí Mọ̀lẹ̀,  
Ọ̀ jàrẹ̀,
- 85 Ebọ̀ ní ó ẹ̀.  
Ẹ̀şù àìşẹ̀bọ̀,  
Ẹ̀gbà àìtẹ̀rù.  
Bí wọn bá múbú ọ̀,  
Èmi nì.
- 90 Bí wọn bá múbú ọ̀,



When he was not at home,  
And the inmates answered that **Ọrọ** was the person.

- 70 **Ọrúnmilà** then got himself ready,  
And went towards the home of **Ọrọ**, his friend.  
When he saw **Ọrọ**,  
He started to shed tears  
Instead of crying aloud.
- 75 He started to chant **iyèrè**<sup>4</sup> instead of uttering  
woeful lamentation.  
Ifá priests do not chant **ẹkún-ípír**<sup>5</sup> through the city.  
He said that was exactly  
What his Ifá priests predicted.  
“The cripple with short arms,
- 80 The cripple with short legs,  
Performed Ifá divination for **Ọrúnmilà**  
When he and **Ọrọ-hùnúhùnú** were friends.  
He was told to take care of **Mọlẹ**,  
He was told that he would do well
- 85 If he performed sacrifice.  
Lack of sacrifice  
Leads to delay in the execution of one’s wishes.  
“If they abused you,  
I am the cause.
- 90 If they abused you,

Èmi ni.  
Èèyàn ò kúkú bú ọ bẹẹ rí,  
Bí wọn bá mbú ọ,  
Èmi ni”.

95 Ọrọ náàá dáhùn, ó ní :  
“Bí wọn bá mbú mi,  
Ìwọ ni.  
Bí wọn bá mbú mi,  
Ìwọ ni”.

100 Èèyàn ò kúkú bú mi bẹẹ rí,  
Bí wọn bá mbú mi,  
Ìwọ ni.  
Ọrúnmílá tún dáhùn ó ní :  
“Bí wọn bá ńsá ọ,

105 Èmi ni.  
Bí wọn bá ńsá ọ,  
Èmi ni.  
Èèyàn ò kúkú sá ọ bẹẹ rí,  
Bí wọn bá ńsá ọ,

110 Èmi ni.”  
Ọrọ náàá tún dáhùn, ó ní :  
“Bí wọn bá ńsá mi,  
Ìwọ ni.

I am the cause.  
Nobody has ever abused you like that.  
If they abused you,  
I am the cause”.

95 **Ọrọ** also answered, and said :

“If they abused me,  
You are the cause.  
If they abused me,  
You are the cause.

100 Nobody has ever abused me like that.

If they abused me,  
You are the cause”.

**Ọrúnmìlà** replied, and said :

“If they struck you,

105 I am the cause.

If they struck you,

I am the cause.

Nobody has ever struck you like that,

If they struck you,

110 I am the cause”.

**Ọrọ** also replied, and said,

“If they struck me,

You are the cause.

- Bí wọn bá ńsá mi,  
 115 Ìwọ ni.  
 Èyàn ò kúkú sá mi bèè rí,  
 Bí wọn bá ńsá mi,  
 Ìwọ ni”.  
 Ọrúnmilá tún dáhùn, ó ní :
- 120 “Bí wọn bá ńtẹ ọ,  
 Èmi ni.  
 Bí wọn bá ńtẹ ọ,  
 Èmi ni.  
 Èyàn ò kúkú tẹ ọ bèè rí,
- 125 Bí wọn bá ńtẹ ọ,  
 Èmi ni.”  
 Ọrọ náàá tún dáhùn, ó ní :  
 “Bí wọn bá ńtẹ mi,  
 Ìwọ ni.
- 130 Bí wọn bá ńtẹ mi,  
 Ìwọ ni.  
 Èyàn ò kúkú tẹ mi bèè rí,  
 Bí wọn bá ńtẹ mi,  
 Ìwọ ni”.
- 135 Ọrúnmilá tún dáhùn, ó ní :  
 “Bí wọn bá ńrín ọ,

If they struck me,

115 You are the cause.

Nobody has ever struck me like that.

If they struck me,

You are the cause”.

**Ọrúnmìlà** replied, and said :

120 “If they derided you,

I am the cause.

If they derided you,

I am the cause.

Nobody has ever derided you like that.

125 If they derided you,

I am the cause”.

**Ọrò** also answered, and said :

“If they derided me,

You are the cause.

130 If they derided me,

You are the cause.

Nobody has ever derided me like that.

If they derided me,

You are the cause”.

135 **Ọrúnmìlà** answered again, and said :

“If they laughed at you,

Èmi ni.  
Bí wọn bá ńrín ọ,  
Èmi ni.

140 Èyàn ọ kúkú rín ọ bèè rí,  
Bí wọn bá ńrín ọ,  
Èmi ni”.  
Ọrọ nááá tún dáhùn, ó ní :  
“Bí wọn bá ńrín mi,

145 Ìwọ ni.  
Bí wọn bá ńrín mi,  
Ìwọ ni.  
Èyàn ọ kúkú rín mi bèè rí,  
Bí wọn bá ńrín mi,

150 Ìwọ ni”.  
Nígbà tọ pẹ  
Tí Ọrúnmilá ti mbe Ọrọ báylí,  
Ni Ọrọ bá ní òún gbàpẹ.  
Lọ bá bu èpẹ ńlẹ,

155 Ó fún Ọrúnmilá,  
Ó ní Ọrúnmilá ó lọ fọn ọn sí àwọn ará ilée rẹ lára.  
Ìgbà tí Ọrúnmilá délé,  
Tó se bèè tán,  
Ni gbogbo àwọn ará ilée rẹ bá gbádùn.

I am the cause.  
If they laughed at you,  
I am the cause.

140 Nobody has ever laughed at you like that.  
If they laughed at you,  
I am the cause.  
**Ọrọ** also replied, and said :  
“If they laughed at me,

145 You are the cause.  
If they laughed at me,  
You are the cause.  
Nobody has ever laughed at me like that.  
If they laughed at me,

150 You are the cause”.  
After a long time  
When **Ọrúnmìlà** had begged **Ọrọ** in this tone,  
**Ọrọ** said that he accepted his pleadings.  
He took some sand from the ground,

155 And gave it to **Ọrúnmìlà**,  
And asked him to throw it on the inmates of his  
house.  
When **Ọrúnmìlà** arrived at home,  
And did as he was told,  
All the inmates of his house became well again.

## NOTES

1. **Ọrọ-hùnúhùnú.** This name is used here as a personal name and it is a combination of **Ọrọ** which literally means "fairy" and "**hùnúhùnú**" which is an imitation of sepulchral noise believed to be characteristic of the speech of fairies.
2. **Ọkà.** Apudding made from yam-flour or cassava flour.
3. **Dànpára.** A disease which affects the soles of the feet rendering the afflicted incapable of walking steadily.
4. **Ìyẹrẹ.** A chanted form of Ifá divination poetry sometimes rendered with the accompaniment of drums.
5. **Ẹkún-ìpín.** This is another name for **ìyẹrẹ**. It is so called because of the wailing voice sometimes adopted by the chanter of **ìyẹrẹ**.



### xiii. **Ọlófín** And His priceless Kolanut Tree

This poem narrates a myth about **Ọlófín** and his kolanut tree. **Ọlófín**, otherwise known as **Odùduwà**, is believed to be the great ancestor of the Yoruba people. Several myths tell of **Ọlófín**'s descent from **òrun** (heaven) into the earth dangling upon an iron chain. He and some of the **òrìṣà** descended into the city of **Ifẹ̀ Oòḁáyé** where he lived and died. He is believed to have lived for hundreds of years before he died. He had only one child named **Ọkánbí** who in turn had seven children who became the seven most important kings of Yorubaland.

In this story, **Ọlófín** planted a kolanut tree in the backyard of his house. This kolanut tree became so important that the wealth of **Ọlófín** and his family depended largely on it. But after **Ọlófín** had built so many houses, he lacked sufficient space in his backyard and he therefore thought of removing the kolanut tree so as to give him more space. He consulted his **Ifá** priests and told them about the problem of removing the kolanut tree to another place. They prescribed sacrifices for him and he procured all the items and gave them to **Ọrúnmìlà**.

After **Ọrúnmìlà** had received the sacrifices, he himself became puzzled. He did not know how to go about his 'tedious assignment'. At last, he also consulted his divination instruments and he was told to give part of the sacrifice to **Èṣù**, **Sángó** and **Oya**. He also gave some money to these divinities. At night, when **Ọlófín** and **Ọrúnmìlà** had both gone to sleep, the divinities mentioned above sent for strong wind and rain. They uprooted the kolanut tree and transferred it to another place outside the city walls.

In the following morning, **Ọlófín** went into his back-

yard but he did not find the kolanut tree. He was surprised. Soon afterwards, **Ọlọfin** and members of his family started to fall sick. He then consulted his Ifá priests who told him that he had removed an ancient thing from its normal location and in order to be well again, he must return that thing to its original place.

**Ọlọfin** therefore consulted **Ọrúnmìlà** again and asked him to return the kolanut tree to its original place. **Ọrúnmìlà** assured **Ọlọfin** that that was a simple thing but he must perform sacrifice. The sacrifice was almost the same thing prescribed for **Ọlọfin** before the kolanut tree was shifted but the monetary part of it was doubled apparently as a punishment for bothering **Ọrúnmìlà** and his Ifá priests. After **Ọlọfin** had performed the prescribed sacrifice, **Ọrúnmìlà** called on the divinities who first removed the kolanut tree and they came at night and returned it to its original place.

There are two important points in this story. First is the importance of kolanut to the Yoruba people. The importance of kolanut trade to several West African communities is well known to historians and economists. The point of this story is that kolanut has been a valuable commodity among the Yoruba since the ancient times—since the time of **Ọlọfin**. This poem points out that the wealth and prosperity of **Ọlọfin**'s family depended on the mythical kolanut tree. There are still many Yoruba families today whose prosperity depend on their kolanut plantations.

Secondly, the kolanut tree in the story was more than an article of trade to the family of **Ọlọfin**. The health and welfare of his family depended on the kolanut tree, without it, members of the family easily fell ill. The kolanut tree could therefore be regarded as the symbol of wealth, prosperity, health and welfare of

Ọlọfin's family and, as such, it could not be removed anyhow.

To the Yoruba, kolanut is more than a mere article of trade. It is an important instrument of divination. With it people believe that they could easily communicate with their ancestors and the divinities whom they worship. Hence the following lines of **Ẓàngó** poetry :

“Igi męta là bá ęe lóore.  
Ẹ ję á ęegi obì lóore;  
Obì níi bẹkú,  
Obì níi bàrùn.  
Ẹ ję à ęegi ata lóore.  
Bá a bá gbóná,  
Wọn a ní a dínfa sí 'ọn lójú,  
Ẹ dínfa sí 'ọn lẹnu . . . . .  
Ẹ ję á ęegi òwú lóore.  
Èrò tó bá rẹgbọnsẹ,  
Kó mọ fewé òwú nùdí,  
Njọ a bá kú,  
Aşọ níi sin ni . . . . ”<sup>1</sup>

“There are three trees to which we should do good.  
Let us do good to the kolanut tree.  
It is the kolanut which begs death,  
It is the kolanut which begs disease.  
Let us do good to the pepper tree.  
When we are hot (i.e. when we are sick),  
They would say “put well-cooked pepper into  
their eyes,  
Put well-cooked pepper into their mouths . . . .  
Let us do good to the cotton tree.

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1: Collected from Madam Ọgúnbọ́dẹ Àbẹkẹ, an expert chanter of **Ẓàngó** poetry who lives at Onísá compound, Àkẹfàń, Ọyọ.

A person who goes to the bush to excrete,  
Let him not use the cotton leaf to clean his anus.  
On the day of our death,  
It is cloth that buries us”.

We see therefore that among the Yoruba kolanut has important ritual and divinatory importance. One of the materials used during the naming ceremony of children is the kolanut. This shows the importance the Yoruba attach to the kolanut in the life of any person as a common food and stimulant and, in addition, as an important instrument of divination.

Thirdly, we see in this story what has been mentioned in the last poem namely, the importance the Yoruba attach to medicinal and magical powers. It may appear fantastic to a non-Yoruba to say that a fully grown kolanut tree can be shifted from one place to the other without any problem, but to the traditional Yoruba, folk medicine can accomplish this without any doubt. In traditional Yoruba society, Ifá priests belonged to a group of highly trained and sophisticated healers, magicians and diviners who used their expertise to accomplish almost anything. Indeed, there is a special branch of Ifá divination known as ‘*ìwòsàn*’ (healing) and another branch known as *àásán* (incantatory poems), in which Ifá priests can specialize as part of their post-initiation training, and which are believed to be capable of accomplishing anything by the use of words, chants and incantations.

Labalábá, awoò 'Lùgùn,  
A dífá fún Ọlọfin,  
Èyí tí yọ̀ọ́ fáwo níṣẹ̀ èyí ó ọ̀ro ẹ.  
Wọn ní kỌlọfin ó rúbọ.

5 Ọlọfin ló dide nílẹ,  
Ó sì mú igi obì,  
Ó gbìn ín sínú ẹ̀kùlẹ̀ ẹ.  
Ó ti gbìngi obì yí,  
Ó lé nígba ọdún.

10 Bí 'ọ̀n bá ká a lẹ̀ẹ̀kan nàà,  
Wọn nń́kà ìwọn igba apẹ̀rẹ̀ mbẹ.  
Yóó sì tà á, tà á.  
N nàà nìraan rẹ̀ẹ̀ tà,  
Tí wọn e kọ́lẹ̀.

15 Tí wọn e ní ẹ̀sin.  
Tí wọn e léèkàn.  
Tí wọn e múlẹ̀ kanlẹ̀, fàgbàlá kànta.  
Ni wọn e wọ̀mọ,  
Ni wọn e wỌlọfin nàà.

20 Ọlọfin sì kọ́lẹ̀ kọ́lẹ̀,  
Ó sì e kan ara igi obì un.  
Bẹ̀ẹ̀ nì, bọ́ bá sì dide, tọ́ bá ké sáwọn awo,  
Bóbìlìn ẹ̀ ò bímọ,  
A bí.

Butterfly, Ifá priest of **Ilúgùn**,<sup>1</sup>  
Performed Ifá divination for **Ọlófín**  
Who would give Ifá priests a tedious assignment.  
**Ọlófín** was asked to perform sacrifice.

- 5 **Ọlófín** left his room,  
Took a kolanut tree,  
And planted it in his backyard.  
He had planted the kolanut tree  
For more than two hundred years.
- 10 Whenever they plucked its fruit,  
They usually plucked more than two hundred baskets,  
And he usually sold a great deal of them.  
These kolanuts were what his family sold,  
And they built houses,
- 15 Bought horses,  
Made stables,  
And built many houses with large gardens;  
From its proceeds, they had money to care for  
their children,  
And they also cared for **Ọlófín** himself.
- 20 **Ọlófín** built so many houses  
until he reached the kolanut tree.  
Whenever **Ọlófín** hastened and called on his Ifá  
priests,  
If one of his wives lacked children,  
They would make her have children.

- 25 Bọ bá ké sí 'òn pé ọ́tá ńdà 'un láàmú,  
 Wọn a ẹ́ẹ.  
 Bọ bá pé owó ilé ọ́n dín,  
 Wọn a ẹ́fá fún un, a lé.  
 Ó loun ọ́ tǎán àwọn kiní wọ́nyí ńsùúrù.
- 30 Ó sì mú owó,  
 Ó sì lẹ́ọ́ fi kan'araa 'gi obì un nì.  
 Ó sì gb'Ókèè 'Pọ́rí ẹ́,  
 Ó sì gbé e kalẹ́.  
 Àwọn awo wọ́nyí ó le bóun pagi yíi dà síbòmíí?
- 35 Ọ́n ọ́ fẹ́ kó run,  
 Àmọ́ ọ́n ọ́ fẹ́ kọ́ wà níhàhín.  
 Báwọn kiní wọ́nyí ó ẹ́ ẹ́,  
 Bí wọn ò ní ẹ́ ẹ́,  
 Ọ́n ọ́ mọ́ọ́ wò ó.
- 40 Ó gbókèè 'Pọ́rí ẹ́ kalẹ́,  
 Ọ́tún awo,  
 Ọ́sì awo,  
 Wọn pé é kalẹ́.  
 Wọn l'Ọ́lọ́fin,
- 45 Wọn ní 'un tó o pe àwọn sí,  
 Wọn ní ị́ẹ́ 'yíí ó ẹ́dọ́ nì.  
 Ị́ẹ́ tó ọ́ pàwọn sí,

- 25 If he told them that his enemies were endangering  
his life,  
The Ifá priests would help him to conquer his  
enemies.  
If he told them that the money he had was not  
enough,  
They would perform divination for him and in-  
crease his money.  
**Olófin** then decided that he would test his Ifá pri-  
ests' patience.
- 30 He took money,  
And with it touched the kolanut tree.  
He then took his Ifá divination instruments,  
Placed them down before him,  
And asked whether his Ifá priests would be able to  
help him move the kolanut tree to another place.
- 35 He said that he did not want the tree to be des-  
troyed,  
But he did not want it any more where it was.  
He said that whether his Ifá priests would be able  
to do it,  
Or whether they would not be able to do so,  
He wanted to see.
- 40 He layed his Ifá divination instruments on the  
floor,  
And called the Ifá priest with the title of **Ọtún²**,  
And the Ifá priest with the title of **Ọsì³**,  
And they both sat down.  
And they said to **Olófin** :
- 45 "The matter over which you called us  
Involves a very tedious and delicate work.  
We are talking of the assignment



- Tọ ọ páwọn ọ wáá ẹ.
- Ifá wí pé un télẹyiun wá torí ẹ dá Ọwọnrínsogbè sí.
- 50 Iṣẹ èyí ó sòro ni.  
N tó le ni.  
Kóun náà ó sì mọ rojú ẹbọ.  
Àwọn awó ní àwọn ó ẹ ẹ.  
Wọn nígba ọkẹ lẹbọ.
- 55 Wọn nígba sòkòtò,  
Igba ẹwù,  
Igba aṣọ bora,  
Ewúré, àgùntàn, ọpọlọpọ adie.  
Epo, ẹkọ, obì.
- 60 Wọn ka gbogbo ẹ fún un.  
Ọrúnmilá kó gbogbo ẹ kalẹ.  
Ngbà tí ọ kà á kalẹ,  
Gbogbo ẹ lỌlọfin dà á lẹ.  
Kọ ha ní in ílé ni ?
- 65 Ọ ka gbogbo ẹ kalẹ tán,  
Ọrúnmilá náà wáá lẹọ suunrun sí i.  
Ọun ó ti wáá ẹ ?  
A gbọ pé gbogbo ònkan wònyí lỌlọfin gbé kalẹ.  
Ngbà tí 'òn sì kífá fun tán,
- 70 Lọ wáá mú wọn bọ 'ẹinkùlé.

- Which you are proposing to give us.”  
 Ifá says that the matter over which this person  
 has cast **Ọwónrínsogbè**,<sup>4</sup>
- 50 Involves a tedious and delicate work.  
 It is a hard job.  
 He should not hesitate to perform the required  
 sacrifice  
 Because his Ifá priests would do the job.  
 The sacrifice is two hundred **ọkẹ** full of cowries,<sup>5</sup>
- 55 Two hundred **şòkòtò**,<sup>6</sup>  
 Two hundred **ẹwù**,<sup>7</sup>  
 Two hundred covering cloths,<sup>8</sup>  
 Goats, sheep, many chickens,  
 Palm-oil, **ẹkọ** and kolanuts.
- 60 They prescribed all these things for **Ọlófín**,  
 And **Ọrúnmílà** placed all these items before them;  
 Because as they mentioned all these items,  
**Ọlófín** delivered them to **Ọrúnmílà** immediately,  
 Since he had all of them in his house all along.
- 65 After **Ọlófín** had given them the prescribed sacrifice,  
**Ọrúnmílà** himself went home to sleep over the  
 matter.  
 He was worried about what to do next  
 Despite the delivery of all the things prescribed  
 for sacrifice.  
 After the Ifá priests had performed divination for  
**Ọlófín**,
- 70 He took them to his backyard,

Ó ní igi yí,  
 Ó lóun fẹ́ kí ẹ́ boun gbe lọ síwájúwájú.  
 Bẹ́ ẹ́ ẹ́ tí ẹ́ dá a lógbón.  
 Ọ̀rúnmlá ní sísẹ́ náà ni.

75 Ọ̀gbà Ọ̀rúnmlá kùò m̀bẹ́ tán,  
 Ọ̀un náàá gbókèè 'Pọ̀rí ẹ́,  
 Ó bù ú, ọ́ yà á,  
 Bóo loun lè gbé kiní yí gbà ?  
 Wọn loun náà ó rúbọ́.

80 Ó rúbọ́ diẹ́ diẹ́ f'Ésù,  
 Ó rúbọ́ f'Ésù tán,  
 Ọ̀wọ́ tó tí bàpò,  
 Ó sì mú ẹ̀rindínlógún,  
 Ó fi l'Ésù lọ̀wọ́.

85 Ó ní ọ́ ọ́ bàá 'un sísẹ́ kan,  
 Ó nígi tí m̀bẹ́ lẹ̀yinkùlé Ọ̀lọ̀fin,  
 Ó ní káwọn ọ́ bá 'un gbé e.  
 Ó sì kọ̀rí sọ̀dọ́ Ẹ̀àngó,  
 Ó fún un.

90 Ọ́ kọ̀rí sọ̀dọ́ Ọ̀ya,  
 Ó fún un.  
 Gbogbo wọn lọ́ wáwó fún.  
 Ó sì soun tí wọn ó ẹ́ fún wọn.

And said, "You see this tree,  
I want you to help me remove it to a distant place.  
You will try to find a way to do it."  
And **Ọrúnmìlà** replied that they would do it.

75 When **Ọrúnmìlà** left the place,  
He too took his Ifá divination instruments,  
And performed divination with his sacred palmnuts.  
He said, "How would he be able to do this job?"  
He too was asked to perform sacrifice.

80 He gave part of the sacrifice to **Èṣù**.  
After giving the sacrifice to **Èṣù**,  
He dipped his hands into his pocket,  
And brought out sixteen cowries,  
And gave it to him as well.

85 And told him, "You will help me do a certain  
work.  
The tree which is at the back of **Ọlọfin**'s house,  
He has asked us to help him shift it to another  
place."  
He then went to **Ṣàngó**,  
And gave **Ṣàngó** his own share of the sacrifice.

90 He went to **Ọyá**,  
And gave her part of the sacrifice.  
He gave money to all of them as well.  
And gave them instructions about what they  
would do.

Wọn ní fọkàn ẹ balẹ Ọrúnmilà.

- 95 Wọn ní ngbà tó o ti fawọn lówó,  
Ìwọ ha tún nísẹ mbẹ ni ?  
Lọọ sùn nlé ẹ.  
Ọrúnmilá bá wọlé lọ.  
Lọ lọọ sùn.
- 100 Kọ dá ẹ, ọ là ẹ,  
Èsú dide, ọ kọrí sọhùún.  
Láàjìn, Ọlọfin náàá ti wọlé sùn.  
Èsú mọkọ, ọ wa igi ndii yípoo.  
Gbogbo 'gọọ rẹ lọ wà yípoo dáadáa.
- 105 Ọ yá, ọ ránşẹ sáwọn Afẹfẹlẹlẹ, awo òde ayé,  
Èfúùfùlẹgẹlẹgẹ, awo òde ọrun.  
Gbogboo wọn pé.  
Şàngó, ó dúó.  
Ngbà Afẹfẹlẹlẹ bẹrẹ sí i,
- 110 Ọ lọgi, ọ lọ ọ, ọ lọ ọ, ọ lọ ọ.  
Pùkẹ tọ fà á tu,  
Ngbàa Şàngó gbé e kán,  
Tepọn mbi wọn gbé lọọ walẹ lẹyìn odi.  
Ngbàa 'lẹ ọ mọọ,
- 115 Ọlọfin bọ 'ẹinkùlé,  
Yáú !

And they promised him thus, “**Ọrúnmílà**, you  
should have perfect peace of mind.

95 Since you have given us money,  
What is left for you to do ?  
Go home and sleep”.  
**Ọrúnmílà** therefore went home,  
And he fell asleep.

100 After some time,  
**Èṣù** stood up and went to the appointed place.  
By the middle of the night, **Ọlófín** himself had slept  
away.  
**Èṣù** took a hoe and dug the ground round the tree.  
He dug into all its nooks and corners.

105 He then sent for Gentle-wind, **Ifá** priests of the  
earth;  
And Rough-wind, **Ifá** priests of **ọrun** (heaven).  
They all responded.  
**Ẓàngó** stood in readiness.  
Gentle-wind first started the job.

110 He twisted the tree persistently,  
And uprooted it suddenly,  
**Ẓàngó** lifted it up immediately,  
And placed it carefully inside the hole prepared for  
it outside the town walls.  
When day dawned,

115 **Ọlófín** went into his backyard,  
And found it empty.

Kò báwọn tí 'òn sísẹ.  
Kò bági m̀bẹ.  
Ilé lẹ̀lẹ̀ bỌ̀rùnmílà.

120 Kéréfọgbọ̀nşenú,  
Èyí ọ ha pọ̀ bálí ?  
Bóo lo ti dọgbọ̀n ẹ ?  
Ọun ọ bági tóun wí m̀bẹ̀ mọ.  
Ó ní háwù, ó níşẹ wo a ní.

125 Ó lọ tán náà nù un.  
Ọlọfin, ó şe bẹ̀ẹ̀ tán,  
Ó tó bí ijọ̀ m̀eta,  
Ó di pọ̀mọ̀ ẹ̀ ńgbóná,  
Ọ̀jòjò ńdà bò ó.

130 Kò lálàáfíà.  
Kò gbádùn mọ.  
Gbogbo ńkán bẹ̀rẹ̀ síi jẹ ẹ̀ ńyà.  
Írú èwo ha sì a tún ní ?  
Ó tún mééjì kẹ́ẹ̀ta,

135 Ó kọ̀rí, 'óko aláwo.  
Héè! wọn ní ńkan ègún kan nù un.  
Nńkan ègún kan lọ̀ lẹ̀ şe.  
Ífá wí pẹ̀ 'hun téléyiun şe.  
Kó tóó wáá dá Ọ̀wọ̀nrínşogbẹ̀,

140 Ífá wí péun tí ọ̀ d́́a ní.

- He found neither those who did the job  
 Nor the tree itself.  
 He went immediately to Òrúnmílà's house.
- 120 He exclaimed, "The small man with a mind full of  
 wisdom,  
 Isn't this fantastic ?  
 How did you do it ?  
 I didn't find the said tree there anymore".  
 Òrúnmílà replied, "It was a small work.
- 125 That is the end of the matter".  
 After Ọlọ́fin had got the job done,  
 About three days later,  
 His children became sick.  
 He too was ill,
- 130 And he had no peace of mind.  
 He no longer enjoyed good health.  
 He lacked many good things.  
 "What type of thing is this ?" he said.  
 He added two cowries to three,
- 135 And went to his Ifá priests.  
 They said, "There is one forbidden thing  
 Which you have just done".  
 Ifá says that the thing which this person did  
 Before Ọwónrínṣogbè was cast for him,
- 140 Is a bad thing.



Kọ yáa fẹbọ ti nkan náà dáadáa.  
Tọ bá jẹ mọ pé èyán mú nkan kúò mbi nkan ni,  
Kó sì tún yáa lẹọ padà fi síbẹ dáadáa.  
Ọ dá ẹ, ọ là ẹ,

- 145 Ọlọfin lóhun toun ẹ nií.  
Obi yí, baba àwọn ló gbìn ín 'bẹ.  
Háàà ! Wọn lẹọ ńpẹ.  
Ó tún fọn ọn,  
Ọ kọríí 'lé Ọrúnmilà.
- 150 Tòò, o ó tún gbàun o.  
Ohun tí o boun ẹ lẹẹkan,  
Ọrúnmilá ní èyí un ha tun ní pé á ńdáfá mọ ?  
Ó ní ẹ bí o ti mohun orò.  
Igba ọkẹ lẹẹkíní,
- 155 Igba ọkẹ lẹẹkejì.  
Ewúré, ó nígba ni o.  
Àgùtàn, ó nígba ni.  
Epo bẹẹ, ẹkọ bẹẹ.  
Gbogbo ẹ, ó tún gbaun orò.
- 160 Ó tún fún Sàngó.  
Ó tún fÉsù.  
Ó tún lọ lèé fỌya.  
Kòtòò tẹẹkan náà.

He should perform plenty of sacrifice because of it.

If it is a question of taking away something from its usual place,

He should return the thing to its original place.  
After some time,

145 **Olófin** confessed to his diviners in these words :

“The matter concerns a kolanut tree planted by our father”.

The Ifá priests asked him to hurry (and return it to its original place).

**Olófin** started out again,

And went to **Òrúnmìlà**’s house and said,

150 “Well, you are going to help me again.

What you did for me last time . . . . . ”

**Òrúnmìlà** said, “That does not require any divination at all.

Don’t you know all the items prescribed for sacrifice ?

Two hundred **òkẹ́** measures of cowries the first time,

155 Two hundred **òkẹ́** measures of cowries the second time.

Two hundred goats.

Two hundred sheep.

Plenty of oil, plenty of **ẹ̀kọ́**”.

He took everything from him,

160 And gave part of it to **Ẹ̀ṣàngó**.

He also gave to **Èṣù**.

And he gave to **Ọ̀ya** as well.

The same hole which they dug last time,

- Èsú sì tún wá lóru,  
 165 Ó sì tún wáá wà á.  
 Aféfẹ́ tún-şigi lẹ̀hùún.  
 Itepon níhín.  
 Wọn tún wààpẹ́ yí i ndíí poo.  
 Şàngó rán 'ni sójò.
- 170 Òjó tún dé.  
 Igi ọ̀ bọ̀wé wò.  
 Wọn sì tún dí kòtòò tẹ̀hún.  
 Ilẹ́ẹ́ tún mọ́,  
 Lọ́lọ́fin tún bagi obì kegé.
- 175 Ó ní bèẹ́ gẹ́gẹ́  
 Ní àwọn awo òún nşenú rere,  
 Tí wọn fi npe 'Fá.  
 Labalábá awoò 'Lùgùn,  
 Dífá fỌ́lọ́fin,
- 180 Èyí tí yọ̀ọ́ fáwo níşẹ́ èyí ó şòro şe.  
 Èròò 'Po,  
 Èrò Ọ̀fà,  
 Ẹ́ wáá bá ní ní jẹ̀bútúú 're.  
 Jẹ̀bútúú 're là á bá ní lẹ́şẹ́ Ọ̀barişà.

- Èṣù** came at night,  
 165 And dug it out again.  
 The wind uprooted the tree,  
 And it was replaced in its original position.  
 They gathered soil around it.  
**Ṣàngó** sent for rain.
- 170 And rain started to fall.  
 The tree did not lose a single leaf.  
 They covered up the other pit.  
 When day dawned again,  
 And **Ọlófín** found the kolanut tree standing erect  
 in its original place,
- 175 He said that was exactly  
 How his Ifá priests employed their good voices  
 In praise of Ifá.  
 Butterfly, Ifá priest of **Ìlúgùn**,  
 Performed Ifá divination for **Ọlófín**
- 180 Who would gave Ifá priests a tedious job to do.  
 Travellers to **Ìpò**,  
 Travellers to **Ọfà**,  
 Come and find us with plenty of good fortune.  
 One is usually found with plenty of good things  
 at the foot of the king of all **òrìṣà**°.

## NOTES

1. **Ìlúgùn.** A small town half-way between **Atẹ̀òkùta** and **Ìbàdàn**.
2. **Ọ̀tún.** An important title among Ifá priests and in Yoruba political administration. The bearer of this title, who is normally the deputy of the most important chief in the hierarchy, sits on the right side of his superior. The word **ọ̀tún** literally means 'right'.
3. **Ọ̀sì.** The bearer of this title is usually next in rank to **Ọ̀tún** and therefore third in importance to the paramount chief on whose left side he sits; hence his title which literally means 'left'.
4. **Ọ̀wọ̀nrínsogbè.** One of the minor two hundred and forty categories of the Ifá divination corpus.
5. Two hundred **ọ̀kẹ́** full of cowries. This is equivalent to 200 x 20,000 cowries (one **ọ̀kẹ́** = 20,000 cowries). In modern Nigerian currency, that will be equivalent to fifty pounds (one **ọ̀kẹ́** = five Nigerian shillings).
6. **Ẹ̀kòtò.** This is the Yoruba generic name for all types of trousers and pants used by men.
7. **Ẹ̀wù.** This is also the generic name for all types of garments worn by men.
8. Covering cloth. It is regarded as compulsory for every Yoruba to have at least one covering cloth with which he covers himself up at night. It is therefore a sign of abject poverty for anyone to lack a covering cloth. Hence the proverb "Dandan ni owó orí, ọ̀ràanyàn laṣọ̀ ìbora" (It is compulsory to pay government poll tax as it is equally compulsory to have a covering cloth).
9. King of all **òrìṣà** here refers to **Ọ̀rúnmilà**.

#### xiv. The Consequences of Overzealousness in Prayer Or How the Eye Got Its Pupil

Stories of *enfant terrible* are very common in Yoruba oral poetry. In Fágúnwà's book **Ògbójú Ọdẹ Nínú Igbó Irúnmọlẹ** we read of **Ajàntáálá**, an *enfant terrible*, whose story is similar in many respects to the one below.

In this poem, the birth of the vicious cannibal to its parents was caused mainly by its mother's overzealousness in her prayers while asking for a child. The forbidden statement which she uttered and which led to the birth of the *enfant terrible* was:

"A good child.....

Who would be so wise

That his wisdom would be more

than that of children of his age-group".

Prayer in Yoruba religion, known as **iwúre**, is very important but it must be done according to strict procedure. In this story, the barren woman ran into trouble because of her great anxiety to have a child which made her to forget what she had been told not to say on the fifth day while praying before **Òṣàálá**. Therefore, while, for the Yoruba, it is good to open up one's mind as much as possible while praying, it is necessary to observe whatever don'ts one has been asked to observe by the diviners. Overzealousness in prayer could lead to unwanted results.

When she delivered the child, they found **ààjà**, the metal rattle of **Òṣàálá** (the creation divinity), in his hands as a sign that he belonged to that **òrisha** to whom his mother prayed before he was born. It was in an attempt to propitiate his rattle that he offered fish,

meat, bird and, lastly, human flesh to it. It could therefore be said that the enfant terrible, for the Yoruba, belonged to an ancient and primitive time when human sacrifices were still being offered to divinities. A mother who asks the gods to give her an extra-ordinary child could be given this type of child who belongs to the world of the supernatural and who cannot be socialised into the well-ordered, value-conscious society of human beings.

Like the supernatural powers; such a child, since he does not belong to the world of human beings, starts talking and walking immediately after his birth. He therefore misses completely the socialisation processes of the first few years of the life of normal children. Hence he does not understand why human flesh should not be eaten or why one should not kill one's parents for food when one is hungry. Since he does not live and develop as a normal child, he cannot be expected to die as a normal child. Hence, instead of dying like any other normal person, he entered into the eyes of a man and became the pupil of that man's eyes.

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1. D. O. Fagunwa, *Ogboju Odé Ninu Igbo Irunmọlẹ*, Nelson, London, 1950, pp. 75 — 81.

- Ìwákúwàá, n ní mú wọ̀n rí ìríkúrí,  
 Dífá fún Àgàndòríbí.  
 Njọ tí nlọ lẹ́ẹ̀ tọ̀ọ ọmọ lẹ́dọ̀ Òrìsà,  
 Àgàndòríbí nìí,
- 5 Òún ha lẹ́ bí bá yíí?  
 Òun ọ mọ́ọ pọ̀nmọ́ ọlọmọ́, gbọmọ́ ọlọmọ́ jó báíí.  
 Hàín, bóun bá sì kosùn tán,  
 Òun a lẹ́ọ fí nùgírí.  
 Irúu kín nìí ?
- 10 Tomi ojú tomi ojú,  
 N lọ fọ̀n ọ̀n,  
 Lọ kọ́rí sọ́dọ̀ àwọ̀n Ìwákúwàá,  
 Awo nì wọ̀n.  
 Ẹ̀ yẹ̀un lẹ́ọkààn ‘bò wò.
- 15 Fà nílẹ̀, Ogbèhúnlé.  
 Wọ̀n ní, “Àgàndòríbí, wọ̀n lóó bíí.  
 Wọ̀n ní lẹ́dún nìí náà nì.  
 Àmọ́ bó ó tí ẹ̀ rẹ́e o.  
 Ìgbín márùún,
- 20 Mọ́ọ kó o lọ sọ́dọ̀ Òòsà.  
 Bí o ó tí wí kó e ọ̀jọ́ márùún nìí,  
 Tọ́ bá dìjọ́ márùún, mọ́ wíí bá yíí o”.  
 Ngbà tí ọ́ dọ́dọ́ Òòsà,



An unscrupulous and desperate search leads to regrettable results.

Ifá divination was performed for **Àgà̀nò̀rìbì**<sup>1</sup>

When she was going to beg **Òrìṣà**<sup>2</sup> for a child.

The barren woman known as **Àgà̀nò̀rìbì**

- 5   Wondered whether she would ever be able to have her own child,

And stop carrying about and comforting other people's children.

After rubbing herself with camwood ointment, She usually painted the bare wall with what remained in her palms.<sup>3</sup>

“What an unfortunate situation?”, she said to herself.

- 10   With tears in her eyes,

She started off on her journey

To the abode of the diviners known as **Ìwákúwàá**, They were a party of Ifá priests.

She asked them to perform divination for her.

- 15   When the priests cast the divining chain on the ground, they saw the signature of **Ogbèhúnlé**.<sup>5</sup>

They said, “Look here, **Àgà̀nò̀rìbì**, you will certainly have your own child

This very year.

But you must do the following things.

You must offer five snails<sup>6</sup>

- 20   As sacrifice to **Òṣà**,

And say such and such a prayer for the first four days.

But on the fifth day, don't say such and such”.

When she got to the temple of **Òṣà**,

- Ó figbín kíńí bọ ọ.
- 25 Ọ şàdúà,  
 Ilẹẹ kún.  
 Ó dijọ kejì,  
 Ó tún figbín kejì bọ ọ.  
 Ó tún şàdúà.
- 30 Ijọ kẹta,  
 Ó tún şàdúà.  
 Ijọ kẹrin,  
 Ó tún şàdúà.  
 Ngbòó dijọ karùún,
- 35 Tó tún mú gbíń karùún débẹ,  
 “Ọmọọ re,  
 Tí ọ láálùbárikà,  
 Tí ọ kọólé léun lérí,  
 Tí ọ şe pé yọọ gbòọn,
- 40 Tí ọgbọọn rẹ ọ ju tẹgbẹ ẹ lọ,  
 N náà ní o foun o.”  
 Kò móşù ọhún jẹ.  
 Ngbà tí ọ yàá,  
 Tí Àgàńòríbí ọò lóyún,
- 45 Ó lóyún ń tán,  
 Òńká şíkẹwàá,  
 Wẹẹẹ ọmọ.

- She offered the first snail to him,
- 25 And said her prayers  
For a long time.  
On the second day,  
She offered the second snail to him,  
And prayed again.
- 30 On the third day,  
She prayed again.  
And on the fourth day,  
She also prayed.  
On the fifth day,
- 35 When she took the fifth snail to the shrine,  
she prayed thus :  
“A good child,  
Who would have many good things of life,  
Who would build a house for me,  
Who would be so wise
- 40 That his wisdom would be more than that of  
children of his age-group,  
That is the child you should give me’’.  
It was in that very month that she became pregnant.  
After some time,  
When *Àgàndoribí* became pregnant,
- 45 And the pregnancy became certain,  
In the tenth month by inclusive counting,  
She had a baby.

- Ngbà tí ó bí,  
 Ó bí i lómọ tuntun kalẹ.
- 50    Ọ mọ fòò,  
       Ọ dáá bí ẹpà.  
       Ngbà tí wọn ó wo àtẹlẹwọọ rẹ,  
       Wọn rí ààjà mbẹ,  
       Ló di ààjà un mọwọ.
- 55    Tó ẹ pé géndé mẹta ò leè ya ọwọ ẹ,  
       Kó fi mú ààjà un kúò mbẹ.  
       Hà! a á a ti wáá ẹ báyí?  
       Iwin irú ọmọ wo lèyí?  
       Hà! a á a ti wáá ẹ?
- 60    A ha lè pa á bí?  
       Háin! wọn ní ẹ mọọ wò ó ná.  
       Ngbàa 'lẹ ọ mọọ njọ kejì,  
       Ìyá lẹọ wẹ, ọ mọra,  
       Ngbà tí ọ mọọ bọ, tí ó dérí itẹ,
- 65    Tí ọ bọmọ,  
       Ìjókòó lẹ bọmọ.  
       Hà! kọ fọhùn.  
       Ọ pa guuru,  
       Ọ lẹọ pe baba ọmọ.
- 70    “Ẹ ẹ a wáá wọmọ yíí,

When she delivered the baby,  
It was a fine baby.

50 He was light in complexion,  
And fine like a piece of groundnut.<sup>7</sup>  
But when they examined his palms,  
They found ààjà<sup>8</sup> there.  
He held the ààjà so tightly

55 That three strong men could not open his palms  
And take it off.  
Everybody was surprised saying, "What are we to  
do now ?  
What a strange fairy of a child is this ?  
What are we to do now ?

60 Can we kill him ?"  
Then, they decided to continue to watch him.  
When day dawned on the second day,  
The mother went to take her bath and to take care  
of her labour wounds.  
As she was coming back from the bathroom and  
as she came near the baby's bed,

65 She found the baby,  
In a sitting position.  
She was surprised but she did not say anything.  
She went out hastily,  
And called his father and said,

70 "Come and see the baby,

Òun ló jókòó yìi”.  
Ìbò tíyàá ọ mọọ bọ,  
Pàrá lẹmọ ké.  
Ó ní, “Ìyá, Ìyá ò,

75 N ọ mọ mọ wáà feku bọrun ààjà mi.”

Ìyá ní, ọmọ ò, ọ mọò,  
Ó ní sá sì mọọ méku bọrun ààjà rẹ.  
Ọmọ lokùn,  
Ọmọ nìdẹ,

80 Ọmọ lÀjání Ògún, ọlọjàa Kẹrẹ,

A kílẹ, a kọná odò,  
Ọmọ mi ò.  
Şaworo ní jìnnkúnjin.  
Ọmọ, mo bí ọ ná o,

85 Şaworo ní jìnnkúnjin.

Ọmọ lojú,  
Şaworo ní jìnnkúnjin.”  
Ìyá lẹọ reku lọjà.  
Ó ní ọ lẹọ lẹta,

90 Ó lẹta, ó sè é,

Ó gúnýán tì í,  
Ó sì fi bọ ààjàa rẹ.  
Ó yánlẹẹ rẹ,

He is sitting down”.

As the mother was coming back,

The baby cried in a loud voice,

And said, “Mother, mother,

75 I want to offer a rat as sacrifice to my ààjà”.

And the mother answered thus, “My child, my child,

Take a rat and offer it to your ààjà.

Children are okùn beads.<sup>9</sup>

Children are as precious as brass,<sup>10</sup>

80 My own noble child, Àjàní, offspring of Ògún lineage,<sup>11</sup> owner of Kèré market<sup>12</sup>

Where we greet those people in the house and those on the way to the river.

O! my dear child.

Şaworo makes a deep and rhythmic sound.<sup>13</sup>

My child, I have given birth to you whatever the consequences.

85 Şaworo makes a deep and rhythmic sound.

Children are one’s own eyes.<sup>14</sup>

Şaworo makes a deep and rhythmic sound”.

The mother then went and bought a rat in the market.

The baby ordered her to grind pepper.<sup>15</sup>

90 She ground the papper, cooked the rat,

And prepared pounded-yams<sup>16</sup> with it.

The baby offered everything to his ààjà.

He left part of it on the floor,<sup>17</sup>

Ọmọ jẹ ẹ.

95 Kó dijọ kejì, ó tún pèyá.  
Ó ní, "Ìyá, ìyá,  
N ọ mọ mọ wáá feja bọrun ààjà mi".  
Ìyá ní, "Ọmọ ọ, ọmọ ọ,  
Mọọ méja bọrun ààjà rẹ.

100 Ọmọ lokùn,  
Ọmọ nide,  
Omọ lÀjàní Ògún, ọlójàa Kẹrẹ.  
Á kilé, a kọnà odò,  
Ọmọ mi ọ,

105 Şaworo ní jìnnhúnjìn.  
Ọmọ, mo bí ọ ná o,  
Şaworo ní jìnnhúnjìn.  
Ọmọ lojú,  
Şaworo ní jìnnhúnjìn.

110 Mo bí yìí ná o,  
Şaworo ní jìnnhúnjìn.  
Ọmọ lokùn o ọ,  
Ọmọ nide,  
Şaworo ní jìnnhúnjìn".  
Ó tún méja,  
Ọ yánlẹẹ rẹ,  
Ó jẹ ẹ.  
Ó dijọ kẹta,  
Ilẹẹ tún mọ.



And ate part of it.

- 95 On the second day, he called his mother again.  
He said, "Mother, mother,  
I want to offer fish as sacrifice to my ààjà".  
The mother answered thus, "My child, my child,  
Take a fish and offer it to your ààjà.

- 100 Children are **okùn** beads.  
Children are as precious as brass.  
My own noble child, **Àjàní**, offspring of **Ògún** lineage, owner of **Kèrẹ́** market  
Where we greet people in the house and those on  
the way to the river.  
O! my dear child.

- 105 **Şaworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.  
My child, I have given birth to you whatever the  
consequences.  
**Şaworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.  
Children are one's own eyes.  
**Şaworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.

- 110 I have given birth to this one whatever may happen next.  
**Şaworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.  
I hail you, my baby, children are **okùn** beads,  
Children are as precious as brass.  
**Şaworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound".

- 115 The baby took the fish,  
Offered it to his ààjà,  
And ate part of it.  
On the third day,  
As day dawned again,

- 120 Ìyá rọ ọ lágbo, ṣegbá sàwo tán,  
 Kegé ló tún jókòó.  
 Ó ní, “Ìyá, iyá;  
 N ọ mò mò wáá fẹyẹ bọrun ààjà mi.”  
 Ìyá ní, “Ọmọ ò, ọmọ ò,
- 125 Mọọ méyẹ bọrun ààjà rẹ.  
 Ọmọ lokùn,  
 Ọmọ nide,  
 Ọmọ lÀjàní Ògún, ọfójàa Kẹrẹ,  
 A kílẹ, a kọnà odò,
- 130 Ọmọ mi ò,  
 Ẹaworo ní jìnnkúnjin,  
 Ọmọ, mo bí ọ ná o,  
 Ẹaworo ní jìnnkúnjin.  
 Ọmọ lojú,
- 135 Ẹaworo ní jìnnkúnjin.  
 Mo bí yìí ná o,  
 Ẹaworo ní jìnnkúnjin.  
 Ọmọ lojú,  
 Ẹaworo ní jìnnkúnjin.”
- 140 Ó méyẹ, ó e bọrun ààjàa rẹ.  
 Ọ yánlẹẹ rẹ,  
 Ọ jẹ é,  
 Ngbòó dijọ kẹẹrin,

- 120 As the mother gave him **àgbo**<sup>18</sup> and other necessities,  
 The baby sat up again.  
 He said, "Mother, mother,  
 I want to offer a bird as sacrifice to my **ààjà**".  
 The mother answered thus, "My child, my child,
- 125 Take a bird and offer it to your **ààjà**.  
 Children are **okùn** beads,  
 Children are as precious as brass.  
 My own noble child, **Àjàní**, offspring of **Ògún**  
 lineage, owner of **Kèrè** market.  
 Where we greet people in the house, and those on  
 the way to the river.
- 130 O! my dear child.  
**Şaworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.  
 My child, I have given birth to you whatever the  
 consequences.  
**Şaworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.  
 Children are one's eyes.
- 135 **Şaworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.  
 I have given birth to this whatever may happen  
 next.  
**Şaworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound  
 Children are one's own eyes.  
**Şaworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound."
- 140 The baby then took a bird, offered it to his **ààjà**,  
 Placed part of the sacrifice on the floor,  
 And ate part of the sacrifice.  
 On the fourth day,

- Kegé lómọ tún jókòó;
- 145 Ó ní, “Ìyá ò, ìyá ò,  
 N ọ mọ mọ wáá fẹran bọrun ààjà mi.”  
 Ìyá ní, “Ọmọ ò, ọmọ ò,  
 Mọọ mẹran bọrun ààjà rẹ.  
 Ọmọ lokùn
- 150 Ọmọ nide,  
 Ọmọ lÀjàní Ògún, ọlójàa Kẹrẹ,  
 A kilé, a kọnà odò,  
 Ọmọ mi ò,  
 Saworo ní jìnnkúnjin.
- 155 Ọmọ, mo bí ọ ná o,  
 Saworo ní jìnnkúnjin  
 Ọmọ lokùn,  
 Ọmọ nide,  
 Saworo ní jìnnkúnjin.
- 160 Mo bí yìí ná o,  
 Saworo ní jìnnkúnjin.  
 Ọmọ mọọ pá,  
 Saworo ní jìnnkúnjin.”  
 Ó tún pẹran,
- 165 Ó yánlẹẹ rẹ sààjà tó mu lẹwọ.  
 Ó tún jẹ ẹ.  
 Kílẹ ọ mọ njọ kaàrún,

The baby was found in a sitting position again.

- 145 He said, "Mother, mother,  
I want to offer an animal to my ààjà."  
The mother answered thus, "My child, my child,  
Take an animal and offer it to your ààjà.  
Children are okùn beads,

- 150 Children are as precious as brass.  
My own noble child, Àjàní, offspring of Ògún  
lineage, owner of Kẹrẹ market  
Where we greet people in the house and those on  
the way to the river.  
O! my dear child.  
Şaworo makes a deep and rhythmic sound.

- 155 My child, I have given birth to you whatever the  
consequences.  
Şaworo makes a deep and rhythmic sound.  
Children are okùn beads,  
Children are as precious as brass.  
Şaworo makes a deep and rhythmic sound.

- 160 I have given birth to this whatever may happen  
next.  
Şaworo makes a deep and rhythmic sound.  
My child, take the animal and kill it.  
Şaworo makes a deep and rhythmic sound."  
Then, the baby killed the animal,

- 165 And offered it to the ààjà which he held in his  
hand,  
And he ate part of it.  
When day dawned on the fifth day,

- Ó ní, “Ìyá ò, iyá ò,  
Mọ fẹ́é fodidi ẹnì bọrun ààjà mi.”
- 170 Ìyá ní, “Ọmọ ò, ọmọ ò,  
Mọọ módidi ẹnì bọrun ààjà rẹ.”  
Ọmọ lokùn,  
Ọmọ nide,  
Ọmọ lÀjàní Ògún, ọlọjàa Kẹrẹ,
- 175 A kílẹ, a kọ̀nà odò,  
Ọmọ mi ò,  
Şaworo ní jìnnhúnjìn.  
Ọmọ mo bí ọ ná o,  
Şaworo ní jìnnhúnjìn.
- 180 Ọmọ mọọ pá.  
Şaworo ní jìnnhúnjìn.  
Mo bí yìí ná o,  
Şaworo ní jìnnhúnjìn.  
Ọmọ lojú,
- 185 Şaworo ní jìnnhúnjìn.”  
Ngbà iyá é e sẹ́jú,  
Ó gberí lẹ̀rùn rẹ.  
Ó múyàá è,  
Ó pa á,
- 190 Ó sè é.  
Ó jẹ é.

- He said, "Mother, mother,  
I want to offer a whole human being to my ààjà."
- 170 The mother answered thus, "My child, my child,  
Take the human being and offer it to your ààjà.  
Children are **okùn** beads.  
Children are as precious as brass.  
My own noble child, **Àjàní**, offspring of **Ògún**  
lineage, owner of **Kèré** market.
- 175 Where we greet people in the house and those  
on the way to the river.  
O! my dear child.  
**Şaworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.  
My child, I have given birth to you whatever the  
consequences.  
**Saworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.
- 180 My child, go ahead and kill it.  
**Şaworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.  
I have given birth to this one whatever may hap-  
pen next.  
**Şaworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.  
Children are one's own eyes.
- 185 **Şaworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound."  
Before the mother winked her eyes,  
He cut off her head from her neck.  
He took her own mother,  
Killed her,
- 190 Cooked her,  
And ate her up.

- Ngbà tilè ọ mọọ njọ kẹfà,  
 Ngbàa bàbá ti rí i pé  
 Hìlìn, irú iwin báń lóún bí,
- 195 Babá lẹọ pọ́n àdà ní àpọ́nsin,  
 Ó fi tí.  
 Lọ kẹ ojú kalẹ.  
 Kílẹ ọ mọ ní ọjọ kẹfà,  
 Kò pẹyá mọ, baba ẹ ló pẹ.
- 200 Ó ní, “Baba ò, baba ò,  
 Mo fẹ fodidi ẹnì bọrun ààjà mi.”  
 Babá ní, “Ọmọ ò, ọmọ ò,  
 Mọọ módidi ẹnì bọrun ààjà rẹ.  
 Ọmọ lokùn,
- 205 Ọmọ nide,  
 Ọmọ lÀjàní Ògún, ọlọjàa Kẹrẹ.  
 A kílẹ, a kọ̀nà odò,  
 Ọmọ mi ò.  
 Şaworo ní jìnnhúnjìn.
- 210 Ọmọ mọọ pá,  
 Şaworo ní jìnnhúnjìn.  
 Mo bí yìí ná o,  
 Şaworo ní jìnnhúnjìn.  
 Ọmọ lojú,
- 215 Şaworo ní jìnnhúnjìn.



Before the day dawned on the sixth day,  
And the father had seen that  
That was the type of baby he had,

- 195 He went and sharpened his cutlass very well,  
And placed it in a convenient place,  
And sat down impatiently, his eyes blazing with  
anger.

When day dawned on the sixth day,  
The baby did not call his mother, but called the  
father instead.

- 200 He said, "Father, father,  
I want to offer a whole human being to my ààjà."  
The father answered thus, "My child, my child,  
Take a whole human being and offer it to your  
ààjà.

Children are okùn beads,

- 205 Children are as precious as brass.  
My own noble child, Àjàní, offspring of Ògún  
lineage, owner of Kẹ̀rẹ́ market.

Where we greet people in the house and those on  
the way to the river.

My own dear child.

Şaworo makes a deep and rhythmic sound.

- 210 My child, go ahead and kill it.  
Şaworo makes a deep and rhythmic sound.  
I have given birth to this one whatever the con-  
sequences.

Şaworo makes a deep and rhythmic sound.

Children are one's own eyes.

- 215 Şaworo makes a deep and rhythmic sound.

Ọmọ mọọ pá o,  
Şaworo ní jìnnkúnjin.”  
Ngbà tí é e wí bẹẹ tán,  
Babá yọ àdà,

220 Ọmọ họ,  
Ó gbe dàálẹ sàánsàán.  
Baba tẹ le.  
Pẹkí ló kòòyàn lònà,  
Ẹyìn ló kọ da eléyiun.

225 Bí babá bá şıwọ àdà níhìín báíí,  
A sá sábẹ eléyiun.  
Bọ bá şıwọ àdà báíí,  
A sá sábẹ eléyiun.  
Wọ̀n tọ nà,

230 Kóró ló kó séléyiun lẹyinjú.  
Hà! kìn lóún ha sì kàn yí?  
Eléyiun yọ ọ, yọ ọ,  
Kọ yọ.  
Bí babá bá nàka sí i báyií,

235 Pé iwọ ọmọ̀alẹ̀ yí,  
Ọ̀un nàà ó sì nàka báyií,  
Pé iwọ nàà ọmọ̀alẹ̀.  
Bí babá bá pókùùùgbẹ̀ ní ọ,

230 Ọ̀un nàà a lókùùùgbẹ̀ ní ọ.

- My child, go ahead, and kill it.  
Saworo makes a deep and rhythmic sound.”  
Before the father finished saying that,  
He drew his dagger.
- 220 The baby took to his heels,  
And ran with all his ability.  
The father followed him.  
They soon met a third man on the way,  
And the baby turned his back to that man.
- 225 If the father lifted up his cutlass to strike the baby  
here,  
He would take refuge under the third man’s legs.  
If the father lifted up his cutlass to strike the baby  
there,  
He would take refuge under the third man’s legs.  
Then, the baby stretched himself full length,
- 230 And entered into the third man’s eyes,  
Leaving him amazed for such a strange thing.  
The third man tried for long to take him out,  
But he could not take him out.  
If his father pointed a finger at him
- 235 Saying, “You are a bastard.”  
He too would point a finger at his father,  
And say, “You too are a bastard.”  
If his father said, “You will die inside the bush.”<sup>19</sup>  
He too would say, “You too will die inside the  
bush.”

- 240 Bí babá bá ní kò níí dǎa fún ọ,  
    Òun náà a ní ò níí dǎa fún 'wọ náà.  
    Ifá wí pé bírọ̀ lóún pa,  
    Békèé lóún ẹ,  
    Béèyán bá yajúú 'lẹ́ ká na ìka sí ẹyinjú ẹ.
- 245 A á sì rọmọ náà,  
    Tóun náà ọ náka lẹyinjú eléyiun.

240 If the father said, "It will not be well with you";  
He too would say, "It will not be well with you  
also."

Ifá says that to prove that he has not told a lie,  
And that he has not told an untruth,  
If someone opens his eyes and we point a finger at  
his eye-balls,

245 We would see the said baby,  
Pointing back at us from that person's eye-balls.

## NOTES

1. **Àgà̀nòríbí.** Nickname of a barren woman meaning "Barren woman could not deliver a child."
2. **Òrìṣà** here refers to **Òrìṣàńlá** the Yoruba creation god.
3. Instead of rubbing her baby with camwood ointment after rubbing herself, she carelessly rubbed off the remainder on the wall since she had no children to rub with camwood ointment.
4. **Ìwákúwàá.** Name of a party of Ifá priests meaning "Careless and desperate search."
5. **Ogbèhúnlé.** Name of one of the minor two hundred and forty **Odù**.
6. Snails are usually offered to **Òrìṣàńlá**, the Yoruba creation god because they have no blood. White objects are the symbols of this god—white cloth, white food like yams, pounded-yam and white soup prepared with melon.
7. Groundnut is produced in large quantities by the Yoruba and it forms an important part of their daily food either as fried groundnut or as groundnut oil with which the Yoruba cook their soup.
8. **Ààjà.** One of the most important symbols of **Òòṣàńlá**, the creation god. It is a type of metallic rattle used to invoke the presence of that god.
9. **Okùn.** A type of costly beads used by important people.
10. Brass, known as **idẹ** by the Yoruba, is very highly regarded and used as a precious metal in traditional Yoruba society.
11. **Ògún** lineage. Another name for the **Alágbèdẹ** (blacksmith) lineage.
12. **Kẹ̀rẹ́.** Name of an unknown place.

13. This line which occurs regularly throughout this poem is meant to be chanted as a chorus by both the Ifá priest and his client.
14. Children are so precious to Yoruba parents that their value to a man's life can only be compared to the eyes. This is not surprising since children are the greatest care and comfort to a man's life in a society which lacked old-age pension, life insurance or social security.
15. Yoruba food is very highly seasoned with plenty of different types of pepper.
16. Pounded-yam is one of the favourite foods of **Òrìṣàálá**.
17. After something has been offered for sacrifice, part of it is usually left on the floor at the shrine of the divinity concerned. It is permissible for anyone to eat part of this left-over at the end of the sacrifice.
18. **Àgbo**. A medicinal mixture made from roots of plants, leaves and other herbal materials. It is offered to the child everyday.
19. To die in the bush where nobody can reach one's corpse or to die in any distant place is to deprive one the traditional burrial in the ancestral home and therefore deprive one the power and dignity of becoming an ancestor.

## xv. Ifá Told Four Puzzles To Prove That He Speaks in Parables

This poem is a good example of the occurrence of other literary genres within the Ifá divination poetry. In the story, **Ọrúnmìlà** is believed to have told **àrò** to his friends. **Àrò** is a type of puzzle rendered partly in poetic and partly in prosaic form. The story-teller asks a question or makes a statement containing some information which the audience is invited to relate to a particular thing. There are many types of **àrò** and some of the stories of this class can even be classified as tall-tales, but the type that we have in this poem is more akin to a puzzle.

In the first **àrò**, **Ọrúnmìlà** alleged that he saw someone who, after building a house, did not sleep inside the house but was sleeping outside its walls. His listeners were puzzled by such an assertion, and they said that **Ọrúnmìlà**'s statement was not likely to be true. He then took them to a wasp hive and pointing at it he said,

‘Who is the owner of that house?’

They answered, ‘It is a house of wasps’.

He asked, ‘Where are they now?’

They answered, ‘Outside their house.’

He asked them again, ‘Are there no rooms inside the house?’

And they answered, ‘There are’.

Then, he said, ‘Why are they not living inside (the rooms)?’

But as they could find nothing to say, they started looking at him.

He then said, ‘That is the person who built a house And who is sleeping outside its walls’.

They said that they agreed with him”.



In this àrò, Òrúnmìlà used the wasp hive to form the subject of his puzzle. In a predominantly agricultural society, wasp hives are very common and almost any child knows them. So that the subject of Òrúnmìlà's puzzle is common knowledge to his audience. But as common as it seems, it is not easy to know since the poetic device of personification has been used. Òrúnmìlà's audience were probably thinking that the statement referred to a human being and this was why they disbelieved him. But confronted with a wasp hive with many wasps hanging outside it, they immediately saw the appropriateness of the statement when applied to a non-human object. That is why they agreed with him at last.

The telling of àrò involves the projection of human characteristics to non-human and sometimes abstract levels of existence. But not all àrò are exactly like that. For example, the next àrò is : "Someone who has a mouth but cannot speak". The answer to that is the virgins.

The other two puzzles involve two common domesticated animals, the dog and the goat. Òrúnmìlà said that a dead dog could eat more lumps of èkò (a pudding made with maize starch) than a living one. When they disbelieved the assertion, he asked them to bring a dog and offer lumps of èkò for it to eat. The dog could not eat many of the lumps. He then asked them to kill it and cook it. After they had done that, he asked them to bring many baskets of èkò and they ate all the lumps in the baskets with dog meat. He then reminded them of his assertion that a dead dog could eat more èkò than a living one. This puzzle involves an extension of the meaning of the word 'eat' beyond its normal literal usage and once one has been able to do that, the meaning of the àrò is no longer obscure.

The last àrò in which Òrúnmìlà asserted that a dead

goat can cry much louder than a living one involves the same kind of extension of meaning to cover what one can do with parts of a dead goat which could make a louder sound than the goat itself.

In the last few lines of this poem, we see the reason why **Ọrúnmìlà** told these **àrò** to his listeners. He said :

“This story is for the client

So that he may not say that all the things  
that Ifá predicts for him

Do not come to pass quickly,

And therefore say that they are all lies.

There is nothing which he (Ifá) says which is  
not true”.

In other words, the statements and predictions of Ifá are not to be taken at their face values; they are not to be taken literally. To understand the predictions of Ifá one needs to project one's thought beyond the immediate human situation. One has to take a comprehensive environmental outlook in order to understand some of the statements contained in Ifá divination poetry. Furthermore, we say that some of the predictions of Ifá do not come to pass because we do not understand the full meaning of these predictions in the first place. Ifá takes a total view of the universe and on the basis of the elements contained in it, both human, non-human, abstract and supernatural, makes his statements and predictions which usually have a wider, and deeper frame of reference than some of us can easily comprehend.

- Ọrúnmilá ló di mo járó,  
 Mo járóò mi,  
 Ọrò mo já ọ pátí.  
 Ọrò tí mo já jáá já,
- 5 Tí mo jápá ajá,  
 Mo já fùfùlèlèlè àdàbà,  
 Mo jálé Ọlọun pèrẹ.  
 Aséta nìlọ sílé Adó,  
 Èrìnmi níròde Ọwọ,
- 10 Ọrúnmilá loun nìlọ sókèè 'Gẹ̀tí,  
 Nnúu 'lée bàbá òun.  
 Ọrúnmilá loun rí kiní kan.  
 Wọn ní baba Akẹ̀yọ,  
 Wọn ní kìn lẹ wa rii?
- 15 Ó ní òún mò rẹni tọ kọ́lẹ tán,  
 Tí ò sun 'núu rẹ,  
 Tí nìlọ sùn lẹ̀yìn rẹ.  
 Wọn lóo gbéṣeè rẹ dé o,  
 Wọn nírọ ló tó yìi báyiì.
- 20 Èyẹ́n ti ẹ le kọ́lẹ rẹ tán,  
 Tí ọ mọọ lẹ̀ọ sùn lẹ̀yìn 'lé náà,  
 Njéyìi ha dǎa báyiì?  
 Ó loun ò purọ̀.

- Ọrúnmílà said that (once upon a time), he told  
 àrọ́¹ tale;  
 His own àrọ́ tale.²  
 He told his own àrọ́ tale easily and splendidly.  
 He said that he told the àrọ́ tale to a point
- 5 That he had to tear away (his) dog's front legs,³  
 And he helped the dove to remove the dirty straw  
 on its neck,⁴  
 (And he travelled a long distance until) he suddenly  
 entered into the abode of Ọlọ́uns.  
 It was the time when Asẹ́ta ⁵ was going to the city  
 of Adó,⁷  
 When Èrinmìs was going to the city of Ọwọ́,⁹
- 10 And Ọrúnmílà himself was going to Ìgẹ́tí hill,¹⁰  
 The home of his fathers,  
 Ọrúnmílà told his companions that he saw a strange  
 thing.  
 They (his companions) said, "Father, maker of  
 ẹ̀yọ́ marks",  
 What have you seen?"
- 15 He said that he saw someone, who after building  
 a house,  
 Did not sleep therein,  
 But was sleeping outside its walls.  
 They answered him saying, "You have come again  
 with your tricks.  
 This must be a great lie.
- 20 How can a man build a house,  
 And sleep outside the walls of his own house?  
 Does that stand to reason?"  
 But he (Ọrúnmílà) insisted that it was not a lie.

- Ó ní ẹ kálo.
- 25 Wọn sì tè lé e.  
 Nígboó sì débi tí agbọn kọlé sí,  
 Ó sì nàka sì,  
 Ó ní ta ló nilé ỉỉ ?  
 Wọn nilé agbọn.
- 30 Ó ní mbo n wọn wà un ?  
 Wọn ní lẹyìn 'lé.  
 Ó ní sẹ kò sí yàrá mbẹ ni ?  
 Wọn ní mbẹ mbẹ.  
 Kín ni ọ jẹ ó gbẹbẹ ?
- 35 Wọn dákẹ, wọn nẖwò ó.  
 Ó ní ẹnì tọ kọlé tán,  
 Tí nlo sẹyìn rẹ lẹ sùn nù un nì.  
 Wọn láchwọn gbà.  
 Ọrúnmílá ló di mo jàrọ,
- 40 Mo jàrọ mi,  
 Ọrọ mo já ọ pátí.  
 Ọrọ tí mo já jáá já,  
 Mo jápa ajá,  
 Mo sì já fùfùléèlèè àdàbà,
- 45 Mo jálé Olọun pẹrẹ.  
 Asẹta nrelé Adó,

He said, “Alright, (if you don’t believe it), follow me”.

25 And they followed him.

When he got to a place where wasps built their hive,  
He pointed at it,

And said, “Who is the owner of that house?”

They answered, “It is a house of wasps”.

30 He asked, “Where are they now?”

They answered, “Outside their house”.

He asked them again, “Are there no rooms inside  
the house?”

And they answered, “There are”.

Then, he said, “Why are they not living inside  
(the rooms)?”

35 But (as they could find nothing to say), they  
started to look at him.

He then said, “That is the person who built a house,

And who is sleeping outside its walls”.

They said that they agreed with him.

**Ọrúnmìlà** said that (once upon a time), he told  
**àrò** tale;

40 His own **àrò** tale.

He told his own **àrò** tale easily and splendidly.

He said that he told **àrò** tale up to a point

That he had to tear away (his) dog’s front legs,

And he helped the dove to remove the dirty straw  
on its neck.

45 And he (travelled a long distance until) he suddenly  
entered into the abode of **Ọlọ́ṣun**.

It was the time when **Asẹ́ta** was going to the city of  
**Adó**,

Èrìnmì ñròde Ọwọ.  
Ọrúnmilá lóun ñlọ sókèè 'Gẹ̀tí,  
Ilée bàbá òun.

50 Ọrúnmilá lóun rí kiní kan.  
Wọn ní baba Akẹ̀yọ,  
Kín lo wa rí ?  
O tún dé kọ ?  
Ó lóun rí sẹ̀ẹ.

55 Wọn ní bí irúu kín lo rí ?  
Ó lóun mò rẹ̀nì tọ lẹ̀nu tí ò leè sọ̀rọ̀.  
Wọn ní kọ lẹ̀nu nì.  
Ó lọ lẹ̀nuù,  
Ó ní kò sì sọ̀rọ̀.

60 Wọn ló o dé kọ ?  
Wọn ní ta lọ ha lẹ̀nu tí ò leè sọ̀rọ̀ ?  
Ó ní wọn ọ̀ lẹ̀ọ fa obìlìn kan wá.  
Ngbàa wọn fà á dé,  
Ó ní wọn ọ̀ gbaṣọ láraa rẹ̀.

65 Ó sì fọ̀ọ kàndí ẹ̀.  
Ó ní kín lẹ̀yí ?  
Wọn ní òbò.  
Kọ lẹ̀nu ?  
Wọn lọ lẹ̀nuù.

When **Ẹrinmì** was going to the city of **Ọwò**,  
And **Ọrúnmílà** himself was going to **Ìgèṣí** hill,  
The home of his fathers.

- 50 **Ọrúnmílà** told his companions that he saw a  
strange thing.  
They (his companions) said, "Father, maker of  
**ẹ̀yò** marks,  
What have you seen ?  
Have you come up with another trick?"  
But **Ọrúnmílà** insisted that he saw a strange thing.
- 55 They asked him, "What type of strange thing  
have you seen ?"  
He said that he saw someone who had a mouth  
but could not speak.  
They said, "You are probably not sure that he has  
a mouth."  
But he insisted that he was sure that he had a  
mouth,  
And yet he could not speak.
- 60 They said to him, "You have come up with another  
trick".  
They added, "Alright, who is that person who has  
a mouth but who cannot speak ?"  
He told them to go and bring one woman.  
When they brought her to him,  
He commanded them to remove her clothes,
- 65 And he touched her private part,  
And said, "What is this ?"  
They answered, "Virgina".  
He retorted, "Has it no mouth ?"  
They answered, "It has".



- 70 Ọ lálẹnu mọ sọrọ nù un.  
 Wọn láwọn fara mọ ọn.  
 Ọrúnmilá ló di mo járọ,  
 Mo járọọ mi,  
 Ọrọ mo já ọ pátí.
- 75 Ọrọ tí mo já,  
 Mo jápá ajá,  
 Mo sì já fùfùléélèè àdàbà,  
 Mo jálé Ọlọun pẹrẹ.  
 Asẹta nrelé Adó,
- 80 Èrìnmi níròde Ọwọ.  
 Ọrúnmilá lóun nílọ sí òkèè 'Gẹtí,  
 Ilée bàbá òun,  
 Ọrúnmilá lóun mọ tún rí nkaàn.  
 Wọn ní o tún dé ?
- 85 Wọn ní kín lo tún pọ o rí ?  
 Irọọ rẹẹ yí,  
 Njẹ igí dá kọ báyii ?  
 Kín lo tún pọ o rí ?  
 Ó lóun tún rí nkan sẹẹ.
- 90 Ó ní òkú ajá,  
 Ọ lọ mọ sì jẹkọ jààyè lọ o.  
 Wọn rẹrín lọ kánrin,

70 He said, "That is the one who has a mouth but cannot speak".

They all said that they agreed with him.

Ọrúnmílà said that (once upon a time), he told àrò tale;

His own àrò tale.

He told his own àrò tale easily and splendidly.

75 He said that he told àrò tale up to a point

That he had to tear away (his) dog's front legs,  
And he helped the dove to remove the dirty straw  
on its neck.

(He travelled a long distance until) he suddenly  
entered into the abode of Ọlọ́un.

It was the time when Aséta was going to the city of  
Adó.

80 When Èrinmì was going to the city of Ọwò,  
And Ọrúnmílà himself was going to Ìgèti hill,  
The home of his fathers.

Ọrúnmílà told his companions that he saw another  
strange thing.

They said, "You have come again with your tricks.

85 What strange thing have you seen this time.

These your lies,

Are they not a great menace ?

What strange thing have you seen this time ?"

He insisted that he saw another strange thing.

90 He said that a dead dog

Could eat more èkọ<sup>12</sup> than a living one.

They all burst into laughter for a long time.

- Wọn lẹ ọ wáá gbé e dé,  
 Èyí lẹ yọọ wáá yí ọ lẹwọ báyii.
- 95 Kó o pé òkú ajá jẹkọ jààyè lẹ.  
 Òkú ajá, bọ ha ti se jẹkọ jààyè lẹ,  
 Ọ ọ ha jẹ káwọn ó rí i?  
 Ó ní wọn ọ lẹwọ májá nlá kan wá.  
 Kí wọn ọ tójú agbọn èkọọ kan.
- 100 Wọn fajá kalẹ,  
 Wọn mágbọn èkọ,  
 Ajá tí ò ti jẹun bí àtíjẹta,  
 Wọn bèrẹ sẹkọọ hó kalẹ fún un.  
 Ajá gbé kiíní, ó gbé kejì,
- 105 Ngbà tí é e gbé kẹta, nínarùn.  
 Ajá ọ jẹ mọ.  
 Ó ní wọn ọ yọgi sí i,  
 Kí wọn ó lù ú pa.  
 Wọn yọgi sí i, wọn pa á.
- 110 Hain, wọn níbi tí ọ wáá gbé jẹkọ jààyè lẹ,  
 Lónlẹ lo ó ríirọọ rẹ.  
 Ngbàa wọn pa á tán,  
 Ó ní wọn ó wí í,  
 Wọn wí í.
- 115 Wọn fọ ọ nù.

They said, "You have really come up with a good joke.

But this one will be very difficult for you to resolve.

95 You say that a dead dog can eat more *ẹkọ* than a living one.

How that can be possible,

You will make us see".

Then he asked them to go and bring one big dog,  
And get ready one basket full of lumps of *ẹkọ*.

100 They took the dog,

And the basket full of lumps of *ẹkọ* to him.

The dog had not eaten for three days.

They started to give lumps of *ẹkọ* to the dog.

The dog ate the first lump, and the second one,

105 But before it could swallow the third lump, it stretched out its neck in great difficulty.

The dog could not eat any more.

He (*Ọrúnmìlà*) then asked them to get hold of a stick,

And beat it to death.

They brought out the stick and beat the dog to death.

110 They said, "Now, how it will be able to eat more lumps of *ẹkọ*,

Today, you will see your lies".

After killing it,

He asked them to burn off its hair.

They burnt it,

115 And washed its carcase.

Ọ lọọ tọjú epo bíi sáágoò kan.  
Wọn fọ ìsaasùn nù,  
Ní wọn ké e lóri-nti lóri-nti.  
Wọn sè é,

120 Ó jíná,  
Iná dùn ún.  
Wọn tọjúu 'yán.  
Wọn tọjú ọkà.  
Wọn tọjú agbọn ẹkọ bíi mẹtá.

125 Ọrúnmlá léèyàan wa,  
Ọ lọ yáà,  
O ní ẹ mọ sàfira.  
Wọn jagbọn ẹkọ kèení,  
Wọn fẹran ajá jẹ é.

130 Wọn jagbọn ẹkọọ kejì.  
Wọn jẹkẹta,  
Wọn tún parí iyán.  
Wọn tún ñwò yànyàn,  
Pébo lonjẹ kù sí ?

135 Ó ní òún ní òkú ajá jẹkọ jààyè lọ,  
È nírọ ní.  
Gbogbo onjẹ tẹ ẹ gbé kalẹ,  
N náà wáá dà ?

- He procured about one **ṣáágó**<sup>13</sup> full of palm-oil.  
 They washed the cooking pot,  
 Cut the dog into large pieces,  
 And cooked it.
- 120 In time, it became well-cooked,  
 After it had received constant firing.  
 They prepared **iyán**,<sup>14</sup>  
 They prepared **ọkà**,<sup>15</sup>  
 And procured about three baskets full of lumps of  
**ẹkọ**.
- 125 **Ọrúnmìlà** then hailed on them saying, “My friends,  
 It is time,  
 Don’t waste time”.  
 They ate the first basket of **ẹkọ**,  
 With dog meat.
- 130 They ate the second basket of **ẹkọ**,  
 And they ate the third one as well.  
 They also finished the **iyán**,  
 Yet they were still looking about the house eagerly  
 For more food.
- 135 He (**Ọrúnmìlà**) said, “When I told you that a dead  
 dog can eat more **ẹkọ** than a living one,  
 You said it is a lie.  
 All the food you prepared,  
 Where is it?”

N wọn hó lọ yèèè.

- 140 Wọn ní àwọn gbà fún ọ,  
Wọn ní bèẹ̀ ní.  
Ọ̀rúnmilá ló dì mo jàrọ̀,  
Mo jàrọ̀ mi,  
Ọ̀rọ̀ mo já ọ pátí.
- 145 Ọ̀rọ̀ tí mo já,  
Mo jápá ajá,  
Mo sì já fùfùléélèè àdàbà,  
Mo jálé Ọlọ̀n pẹ̀rẹ̀.  
Asẹ́ta írelé Adó,
- 150 Èrìnmì ìròde Ọ̀wọ̀.  
Ọ̀rúnmilá lóun ìlọ sókèè 'Gẹ̀tí,  
Ilée bàbá òun.  
Ọ̀rúnmilá lóun tún rí kiní kan.  
Wọn ní baba Akẹ̀yọ̀,
- 155 Wọn ní kìn lo ha pọ̀ o rí ?  
Èé tí jẹ̀ ?  
Kìn lo tún rí ?  
Ó ní òkú ewúré,  
Ọ̀ lọ̀ mò leè ké ju ààyè lọ̀.
- 160 Wọn ní òkú ewúré,  
Ewúré tọ̀ bá kú ní ọ wàá kèé !

- They all shouted together in a loud voice
- 140 Saying that they agreed with him.  
 They said that he was right.  
**Ọrúnmilà** said that (once upon a time,) he told  
 àrò tale;  
 His own àrò tale.  
 He told his own àrò tale easily and splendidly.
- 145 He said that he told the àrò tale up to a point  
 That he had to tear away (his) dog's front legs,  
 And he helped the dove to remove the dirty  
 straw on its neck.  
 (And he travelled a long distance until) he suddenly  
 entered into the abode of **Ọlọ́n**.  
 It was the time when **Asẹ́ta** was going to the city  
 of **Adó**,
- 150 When **Èrinmì** was going to the city of **Ọwó**,  
 And when **Ọrúnmilà** himself was going to **Ìgẹ́tí**  
 hill,  
 The home of his fathers.  
**Ọrúnmilà** told his companions that he saw yet  
 another strange thing.  
 They said, "Father, maker of **ẹyọ** marks,
- 155 What is it that you say you have seen ?  
 What is it ?  
 What strange thing have you seen again ?"  
 He said, "A dead goat,  
 Can certainly cry louder than a living one".
- 160 They said, "A dead goat !  
 How can a dead goat ever cry ?"



- Wọn ló o gbéseè rẹ dé.  
 Ó ní wọn ọ lẹ́ọ méwúré wá.  
 Wọn kógi tí í.
- 165 Wọn lù ú, lù ú,  
 Ó ké kéé ke,  
 Ènì tí mbẹ lójúde kò gbọ dàjì mbẹ  
 Ó ní wọn ọ lù ú pa.  
 Nì wọn bá méwúré,
- 170 Wọn lù ú pa.  
 Awọ ẹ ló ní wọn ọ kọ hó,  
 Wọn hówọ ẹ.  
 Èsú tí bá a gbégi,  
 Wọn tí kan awọ un sí í.
- 175 Wọn kàànkàn yí etí awọ un poo.  
 Wọn bèrẹ sọbẹ sẹ.  
 Wọn tọjúú 'yán,  
 Wọn tọjú ọkà,  
 Wọn jẹ gbogbo ẹ tán,
- 180 Wọn mu ọtí,  
 Wọn yó dáadáa.  
 Nígbà tí wọn é e pé  
 Àwọn sẹ gbogbo wọn un tán,  
 Ìlú tí gbẹ nta.

- They said, "You have come up with yet another trick."  
 He asked them to go and bring a goat.  
 He asked them to beat it properly with a stick.
- 165 They beat it and beat it,  
 And it cried and cried,  
 But a man standing outside the house could  
 hardly hear half of its cries.  
 He asked them to beat it to death.  
 They then got hold of the goat,
- 170 And beat it to death.  
 The first thing he asked them to do was to remove  
 its skin.  
 They removed its skin.  
 Èṣù helped him to prepare a piece of carved wood  
 on which they fixed the goat's skin
- 175 They nailed small wooden pegs round the goat's  
 skin.  
 They started to cook the meat.  
 They prepared **iyán**,  
 They prepared **ọkà**.  
 They ate everything.
- 180 They drank beer,  
 And became quite satisfied.  
 By the time they finished  
 Doing all those things,  
 The drum placed outside the house had become  
 dry.

- 185 Ìlú tí gbẹ́ nta.  
 Ngbaa wọn jẹun tán,  
 Kí wọn ọ mọọ pé àwọn ònakùn,  
 Èsú bọ́ọ 'dii ìlú,  
 Lọ sọpá sí i.
- 190 Ènì tí mbẹ́ nńúu Akínmọ́rìn,  
 Ènì tí mbẹ́ nńúu 'Lọràá,  
 Wọn ọ deńtí tí ọn fí nńgbọ́.  
 Ó ní òún sọ pé òkú ewúrẹ́,  
 Ọ mọ leẹ ké jààyẹ lọ,
- 195 È nírọ ní.  
 Ọ lẹ ẹ gbọ níisilín,  
 À bẹ ẹ gbọ ?  
 Ènì tí mbẹ́ nńúu Fídítì,  
 Mbẹ náà ní tí nńjóó bọ.
- 200 Òún nńbúròóò 'lù kaàn.  
 Eyí ní pé kí eléyiun ní,  
 Kọ mọ pẹẹ gbogbo nńkan tí Ifá nńsọ foun  
 Kò tètẹ sẹ,  
 Irọ ní nńpa,
- 205 Kò sí nńkan tọ nńsọ tí kọ jẹ òdodo.

185 The drum placed outside the house had become  
dry.

When they finished eating,  
And as they were resting their stomach after the  
good meal,

Èṣù went to the drum,  
And applied drum-stick to it.

190 People who were as far away as Akínmòṣín,<sup>16</sup>  
And those as far away as Ìlọràá,<sup>17</sup>  
Did not have to listen before they heard the drum.  
He said, "When I told you that a dead goat  
Can cry louder than a living one,

195 You said that it was a lie.  
Do you hear (the drum) now,  
Or don't you hear?"  
People as far away as Fídítì<sup>18</sup>  
Started from there dancing to the drum

200 Saying that they heard a strange drum.  
This story is for this client  
So that he may not say that all the things that  
Ifá predicts for him  
Do not come to pass quickly,  
And therefore say that they are all lies.

205 There is nothing which he (Ifá) says which is not  
true.

## NOTES

1. **Àrò**. A type of tall tale containing several puzzles. The reciter keeps his audience in suspense while he resolves the puzzle after a fairly long story told mainly in poetic form.
2. This line emphasizes the point that the **àrò** tale told by **Òrúnmìlà** was an original tale composed by himself.
3. This line is not completely meaningful. It probably refers to the long journey of **Òrúnmìlà** which involved him and his dog in great peril resulting in injury to his dog's front legs.
4. The dove mentioned here is probably a pet kept by **Òrúnmìlà**.
5. **Olórun**. A shortened form of **Olórun** which means "Owner of the heavens"—the Yoruba term for the Almighty God who is also known as **Olódùmarè**.
6. **Aséta**. Name of a title probably indigenous to **Adó Èkitì**.
7. **Adó**. This probably refers to **Adó Èkitì**.
8. **Èrinmì**. Name of an important **Òwò** title.
9. **Òwò**. An important eastern Yoruba city. The **Òwò** kingdom is one of the most ancient Yoruba kingdoms.
10. **Ìgèti** hill. A place at **Ifè** believed to be the abode of **Òrúnmìlà** during the period of his long stay in that city.
11. **Èyò** marks. A type of horizontal tatoo made on the left arm and left leg of any prince or princess of the **Òyó** ruling house. This, together with six horizontal facial marks on each cheek arranged in sets of three shows that a person is of royal blood.

12. **Èkọ**. A food prepared from corn starch.  
It could be in either solid or liquid form.  
In its solid form, it is usually made in lumps wrapped with leaves.
13. **Ṣáánṣ**. A type of big bottle used for storing palm-oil.
14. **Iyán**. Pounded yam.
15. **Ọkà**. Yam-flour pudding.
16. **Akínmọ ọrì**. A village about three miles to **Ọyọ**
17. **Ìlọọrá**. Another village about two miles from **Ọyọ**.
18. **Fiditi**. A place about nine miles to **Ọyọ**.

xvi. Dew-Drops Became The Saviour At A Gathering  
of Enemies Where One Thing Devours the Other.

This poem depicts an interesting and natural phenomenon in which one thing is set against the other as its direct negation or antagonist. Rain negates fire, drought neutralises rain, the hen and the grasshopper are eternally set against each other and so on. The poem is therefore based on a sound observation of the delicate interrelationship between different objects and creatures of nature.

The story is one of **Kankan**, an obscure creature, who invited other creatures and objects of nature to his farm for collective manual work known as **òwè**. As if to dramatize the delicate interrelationship between all the creatures and objects involved, he invited one thing together with its enemy. He invited the grasshopper and the hen, the wolf and the dog, the hyena and the hunter, the gaboon viper and the walking stick, fire and rain, drought and dew-drops. He took all of them to his farm where he assigned for them the work of making heaps. He placed each creature or object next to its enemy. He gave them neither food nor drinks. When they all became hungry, they started to devour each other.

The result of this dramatic situation would have been total chaos and complete annihilation for all the creatures and objects involved but for the intervention of dew who saved the situation. After the enemies had attacked each other, dew started to fall on them and each one of them regained its lost energy. At last, they all recovered and rejoiced together praising the timely intervention of dewdrops.

This story therefore emphasizes the importance of water to life. Water acts not only as a vital necessity of life, but also as a pacifying, revitalising and regenerating substance. For the Yoruba, dew, known to them as *iri*, is more than ordinary water. It serves to refresh man and his environment. It helps both plants and animals to regain lost energy. It is therefore sometimes more beneficial to plants than the heavy down-pour of rain which is characteristic of much of Yorubaland. In contrast to rain, dew is very gentle and without any harsh effects whatsoever. There is even a type of dew known as *iri-àlẹ̀mọ̀* which falls almost without noticing that it is falling until one sees particles of water on leaves and other objects exposed to it. Dew, in contrast to other harsh and opposing objects of nature, is therefore symbolic of life, continuity, fertility and regeneration. It is an indispensable element of life — a substance without which the opposing forces of nature would have destroyed themselves leaving the earth itself in utter chaos and ruination.

In literal translation, *Kankan* means “by force”. From this point of view, another meaning of this poem is that doing things by force is the cause of hatred, opposition, fear and uncertainty in the world. The result is that every creature and object of nature has its own opponent. Thanks to dew and other pacifying elements of nature who act as agents of regeneration and prevent the earth and its inhabitants from total ruination caused by extreme self-interest, greed and the shameless use of naked force.



Ogbèdí ká káá ká,  
 Ogbèdí kun kuun kun,  
 Gàn mù gàn mù rẹ ọ mọ bàà ẹ hán.  
 Kọ mọ bàà ẹ ta jáde.

5 A difá fún Kankan  
 Tí ọ lọ lẹẹ bẹ Tata lọwẹ,  
 Yọọ bẹ Àgbébo adíẹ lọwẹ.  
 Yóó sì bẹ Kòlòkòlò,  
 Yọọ bAjá.

10 Yọọ bẹ Kookò,  
 Yóó sì bẹ Ọdẹ.  
 Yọọ bọká,  
 Yọọ bỌpá.  
 Yọọ bẹná,

15 Yóó bỌjò.  
 Yọọ bỌdá.  
 Yọọ bẹrìwọwọ kányilín wọn.  
 Wọn ní kí Kankan,  
 Wọn ní kó rúbọ.

20 Kọ mọ sì ẹ nkan tó le o.  
 Ó lọ dǎa.  
 Nǵbòó ẹ pé lórùn nńkan tó le ló tí wǎ ńkọ:  
 Ó sì lọọ dǎko.

**Ogbèdí**,<sup>1</sup> the rugged one.

**Ogbèdí**, the very strong one;

Wrap it up very well and prevent its hooks from  
appearing outside,

Prevent them from shooting out.

5 Ifá divination was performed for **Kankan**<sup>2</sup>

Who would go and ask the Grasshopper for collec-  
tive manual work on his farm.<sup>3</sup>

He would also ask the Hen for the same obligation.

He would ask the Wolf.

He would ask the Dog.

10 He would ask the Hyena.

He would ask the Hunter.

He would ask the Gaboon Viper.

He would ask the Walking Stick.

He would ask Fire.

15 He would ask Rain.

He would ask Drought.

And he would ask severe Dew-drops last of them  
all.

**Kankan** was warned

That he must perform sacrifice.

20 He was also told not to be involved in any difficult  
thing.

And he promised to comply.

But his origin was from a hard place.

He went and made a farm.

- Ngba tí ọ dàáko,  
 25 Lọ bá lọọ bá Tata,  
 Ó ní gbàun.  
 Njọ méje òní, o ó bòóun jẹwè.  
 Tatá ní kò rí báun ná,  
 Ó lóun ní ọtá o.  
 30 Ó ní bọ ọ bàá bèun lọwè,  
 Ó ní mọ dèélé Adìẹ o.  
 Hà! ó léyí benu sọsọ un.  
 Kín lòún ọ wa fi ẹ.  
 Işẹẹ kín lọ a tiẹ le ẹ?  
 35 Dídìde tí ó dìde,  
 Ilé Adìẹ lọ kọrí sí.  
 Òkòkónìyèlẹ, gbàun ùn,  
 Ọ lọọ bàáun jẹwè njọ méje.  
 Ó lóun ó sì wá.  
 40 Ó ní mọ bẹ Kòlọkọlọ o.  
 Ó ní èyí benu wíwì un.  
 Kín lòún ó fi ẹ?  
 Işẹẹ kín ló lè ẹ?  
 Ìdìde tí ó dìde,  
 45 Ilée Kòlọkọlọ lọ kọrí sí.  
 Ẹyọlọ, ọkọ àgbébọ,

- After he had made the farm,
- 25 He went to the Grasshopper  
And said, "Please, help me.  
Seven days from today, you will help me on my  
farm".  
The Grasshopper replied, "That is alright,  
But I have an enemy.
- 30 If you want me to help you on your farm,  
Don't ask the Hen for the same obligation".  
Kankan exclaimed, "What! That one with a  
pointed mouth part.  
What will I ever do with him.  
In any case, what work can he do?"
- 35 As soon as he left the Grasshopper's place,  
He went to the Hen's house.  
He hailed her thus, "Mother of many chickens,  
help me.  
You will help me on my farm seven days from  
today".  
The hen said, "I will be there.
- 40 But don't ask the Wolf for the same obligation".  
Kankan answered, "That one with a burnt mouth  
part.  
What will I need him for?  
What work can he do?"  
But as soon as he rose up from the Hen's house,
- 45 He went to the house of the Wolf.  
He said, "I salute you, the stealthy one, husband  
of chickens".

Kòlòkòlò ní hòo.  
Ó lóun lówẹẹ bẹ ọ níjọ méje.  
Hà! Ọ lẹni a fẹẹ jẹwẹ fún tẹlẹtẹlẹ.

50 Ó lóun ọ wàá.  
Ó ní sùgbọn nńkan kan náà ni o,  
Ó ní bó o ti bẹun yí,  
Ọ lájá,  
Ó ní kílí fojú kàn un.

55 Ó léyìun wẹ,  
Èyí bara pupa un.  
Ó ní kín lòún ọ ha fi ẹe ?  
Ó ní kọ gbọdọ délé òun.  
Ìdìde tí ó dìde,

60 Ilẹ Ajá lọ kọrí sí.  
Ajá, ọmọ Oníwàáwá.  
Ajá ní hòo.  
Ó níjọ méje òní,  
Òun ọ bẹ ọ lówẹ kan.

65 Ilẹ lọọ bàáun pa.  
Ajá ní háwù! èyí un wẹ.  
Ó lóun ó kùúkú wá.  
Ó ní àmọ òún lẹtàá.  
Ó ní Ìkookò,

- The Wolf answered, "Thank you".  
He added, "You will help me on my farm seven days from today".  
The Wolf exclaimed, "You are someone I have always wanted to help,
- 50 And I will certainly come.  
But there is only one problem.  
Since you have asked me for this obligation,  
I should say that the Dog  
Does not like to see me".
- 55 **Kankan** said, "That useless one.  
That one with red colour.  
What will I do with him ?  
It is forbidden for him to come to my house".  
But as soon as he stood up from there,
- 60 He went to the house of the Dog.  
He saluted him thus, "Dog, offspring of they who bark loudly".  
And the dog answered, "Thank you."  
**Kankan** added, "Seven days from today,  
I will ask you for an obligation.
- 65 You will help me clear a certain overgrown land."  
The Dog answered, "That is a small matter.  
You can be assured of my presence.  
But I have an enemy.  
The Hyena, I must say,

- 70 Ó ní kílí fojú kàn ‘un.  
 Ó léyíí tí ìkún ẹ mú un.  
 Iṣẹẹ kín lèyiun ó le ẹ?  
 Òun ò ní débẹ páà.  
 Alẹ ijọ kan náà ni.
- 75 Dídìde tí ó dídè,  
 Ilé Ìkòokò lọ kọrí sí.  
 Òmìnín,  
 Ìkòokòó ní hòo.  
 Ó lóun ọ bẹ ọ lówẹ níjọ méje.
- 80 Bẹẹ kówẹ ọhún ó dùn tó.  
 Ìkòokòó lọ dáa, kò burú,  
 Ó lóun ó sí wá.  
 Ó ní nńkan kan náà lóun rí mbẹ.  
 Ó ní mọ bẹ ọdẹ o.
- 85 Ó ní torí kílí ríun lójú.  
 Ó léyíí kúngíí ẹyìn un,  
 Lòun ọ wáá lọ bẹ.  
 Iṣẹẹ kín ló le ẹ ?  
 Ìdìde tí ó dídè,
- 90 Ilé Ọdẹ lọ kọrí sí.  
 Mòńkólómọ,  
 Ọdẹ ní hòo.

- Must never see my face".  
 To which **Kankan** said, "That knock-kneed one.  
 What work will that one be able to do ?  
 I will not go there at all".  
 It was the very same night
- 75 That he stood up,  
 And went to Hyena's house.  
 He hailed him thus, "The beautiful and fast one".  
 And the Hyena replied, "Thank you".  
 He added, "I will ask you for an obligation seven  
 days from today.
- 80 It will be a very pleasant occasion".  
 The Hyena replied, "It is alright.  
 I will come.  
 But I have only one thing to say.  
 Don't call the Hunter for the same obligation
- 85 Because he does not like to see my face".  
**Kankan** retorted, "That one with a hunch on his  
 back.  
 You think I will ever ask him for such an obligation.  
 What work can he do ?"  
 As soon as he stood up,
- 90 He went to the house of the Hunter.  
 He hailed him as "**Mònkólómò**".<sup>4</sup>  
 And the Hunter replied, "Thank you".



Ó ní o ó bòóun jẹwẹ níjọ méje lóní.  
Ọdẹ lọ dǎa.

95 Ó lóun ọ wǎǎ.  
Şùgbọ́n mọ bẹ kiní onjámǎ un o.  
Torí sọ ọ mọ pé  
Bí 'ọ́n tí wǎ lọ náà nù un nì.  
Ó léléwo tiẹ nìl ?

100 Ó ní Ọká.  
Ó léylí bara pàtàpàtà un.  
Işẹẹ kín ló le şe ?  
Èyí tí ńwọ kálẹẹ kii un.  
Òkúùgbẹ, onjámǎ nìl.

105 Púnú ara ẹ.  
Ọ kǎ á léèébú.  
Dídide tí ó dide,  
Ilé Ọká lọ kọrí sí.  
Alápà,

110 Ọká ní hòo.  
Ó ní o ó bòóun jẹwẹ níjọ méje.  
Ó ní ọ dǎa, kò burú.  
Ó ní kiní kan náà nì.  
Ó ní Ọpá ọ fẹràn òun.

115 Ó léylí gbọ̀ọ̀rọ gbọ̀ọ̀rọ ara un,

**Kankan** continued, "You will help me on my farm seven days from today".

The Hunter replied, "That is alright.

95 I will come.

But don't ask that dangerous one for the same obligation.

Since you also know that  
He is that type of person".

**Kankan** then asked, "Who are you talking about?"

100 And the Hunter said, "I mean the Gaboon Viper".  
To which **Kankan** said, "That one with spotted body.

What work can he do.

That one who crawls all over the ground.

That cursed and dangerous one,

105 That very short one".

**Kankan** poured abuses on the Gaboon Viper.

But as soon as he stood up,

He went to the house of the Gaboon Viper.

He hailed him saying, "Offspring of **Alápà**".<sup>5</sup>

110 The Gaboon Viper said, "Thank you".

**Kankan** added, "You will help me on my farm seven days from today".

The Gaboon Viper said, "That is alright,

But there is only one thing.

The Walking Stick does not like me".

115 To which **Kankan** said, "You think that I will ask that very tall and wavy one.

Lòún ọ bẹ lọwẹ,  
Iṣẹẹ kín ló le ẹ ?  
Òun n yóò délé ẹ.  
Dídìde tó dìde,

120 Ilé Ọpá lọ kọrí sí.  
Ọpápejòmọje,  
Ọpá ní hòo.  
Ó lóó bòóun jẹwẹ njọ méje o.  
Ó lọ dǎa.

125 Ó ní ọ láífí.  
Ó ní kiní kan náà ní.  
Ó ní mọ bẹ Iná.  
Ó ní boun tí wulẹ koun ẹ agbára tó,  
Ó ní bộ bá dé,

130 Ó ní yọọ hàun lénmọ.  
Ó léyíí bara pupa un,  
Kíí tilẹẹ ẹèyàan re.  
Tí ọ mọọ rààyàn lára jàì.  
Ìdìde tí ó dìde,

135 Ilée 'ná lọ kọrí sí.  
Ọmọ Ọrara,  
Iná ní hòo,  
Ó ní gbàun.

- For an obligation ?  
 What work can he do ?  
 I will not go to his house".  
 But as soon as he rose up,
- 120 He went to the house of the Walking Stick.  
 He hailed him thus : "Walking Stick who kills  
 snakes but does not eat them".  
 And the Walking Stick answered, "Thank you".  
 He added, "You will help me on my farm seven  
 days from today".  
 The Walking Stick replied, "That is alright.
- 125 It is not out of order.  
 But there is only one thing.  
 Don't ask Fire for the same obligation,  
 Because, however much I try to use my power,  
 As soon as he comes,
- 130 He would worry me exceedingly".  
**Kankan** replied, "That red one.  
 He is not even a good person.  
 Because he usually makes one's body very warm".  
 But as soon as **Kankan** rose up,
- 135 He went to Fire's house.  
 He hailed him as "Offspring of those who destroy  
 with terrible heat".  
 Fire answered, "Thank you".  
**Kankan** added, "Help me.

- Njọ méje, òún ọ bẹ ọ lówẹ.
- 140 Ó lóun ó sì jẹ.  
 Ó ní kiní kan náà ni.  
 Ó ní mọ bẹ Òjò o.  
 Ó ní torí boun bá bèrẹ sí ẹ gbogbo orò ilé òun,  
 Ó ní kí jẹ koun ọ gbádùn.
- 145 Ó léyìlì wẹrẹ ẹsẹ un.  
 Kín lóún ọ ha fi ẹ ?  
 Ìdìdè tí ó dídè,  
 Ilé Òjò ló kọrí sí.  
 Eji,
- 150 Òjó ní hìn.  
 Ó ní o ọ gbòun njọ méje.  
 O o bòóun jẹwẹ.  
 Òjó ló dǎa,  
 Ó lóun ọ wǎǎ.
- 155 Ó lóun ọ wǎǎ  
 Ó lóun ọ wǎǎ.  
 Ó ní sùgbón mọ bẹ Òdǎ o.  
 Ntorí boun bá poun nse kiní kan,  
 Bọ bá dé, kò tún níí joun ọ gbádùn mọ.
- 160 Gbogboo 'yì òun ní ó tiẹ bàjẹ.  
 Ó léyìlì yánhún yánhún un.

Seven days from today, I will ask you for an obligation”.

- 140 And Fire replied, “I will respond.  
But there is only one thing.  
Don’t call Rain (to the same place),  
Because as soon as I start the traditional rites of  
my family,  
He would never let me have peace.
- 145 **Kankan** replied, “That one with tiny feet.  
What will I ever do with him”.  
But as soon as he rose up,  
He went to Rain’s house.  
He hailed him as “The heavy downpour of water”.
- 150 And Rain answered, “Yes”.  
He added, “You will help me seven days from  
today.  
You will help me on my farm”.  
And Rain said, “That is alright.  
I will be there.
- 155 I will be there.  
I will be there.  
But don’t call Drought (to the same place),  
Because, if I try to do anything,  
As soon as he comes, he will not let me rest.
- 160 An he would destroy all my glory”.  
**Kankan** replied, “That very tiny one.

- Kín loun ó fi se ?  
 Ìdide tí ó dìde,  
 Ilé Ọ́dà lọ kọ́rí sí.
- 165 Ọ́dà módò gbẹ hànùn,  
 Ọ́dà ní hòò.  
 Ó ní o ó bòóun jẹwẹ njọ méje.  
 Ó loun ó sì wá.  
 Ó loun ó kùúkú wá.
- 170 Ó ní Ọloun jẹ á jùgbà náà lọ.  
 Ọ́dà ọ fọhùn.  
 Ìdide tí ó dìde,  
 Ilé Ìrì lọ kọ́rí sí.  
 Àşé ibi ẹbọ ó gbèé dà díẹ nù un.
- 175 Ìrì ọmọ Ọpèsè,  
 Ìrì ní hòò.  
 Ó lóó bòóun jẹwẹ njọ méje.  
 Ìrì náà ò poun lẹtàá kan.  
 Ìrì lọ dǎa o.
- 180 Ọloun jẹ á jùgbà náà lọ.  
 Ọjọ pé,  
 Tata lọ kọ dé.  
 Ọfòpèrẹ jánà,  
 Tatá ní hòò.

What will I do with him ?”  
But as soon as he rose up,  
He went to Drought’s house.

165 He hailed him as, “Drought who makes rivers dry  
up suddenly”.

And Drought answered, “Thank you”.

**Kankan** continued, “You will help me on my farm  
seven days from today”.

And Drought said, “I will come.

I will surely come.

170 May God spare us much longer than that time”.  
Drought did not say more than that.

As soon as he rose up,

He went to the house of Dew-drops.

He hardly knew that that was what would make  
his sacrifice acceptable to the gods.

175 He hailed him as, “Dew-drops, offspring of  
wetness.”

And Dew-drops answered, “Thank you.”

He added, “You will help me on my farm seven  
days from today.”

Dew-drops also did not say that he had any enemy.

Dew-drops said, “That is alright.

180 May God spare us much longer than that time.”

When the appointed time came,

The Grasshopper was the first to arrive.

**Kankan** hailed him as, “He who flies gracefully  
across the road.”

And the Grasshopper also answered, “Thank you”.



- 185 Ó sì şilèkùn 'rúu bi a jókòó lí,  
 Ó ní mọọ bọọ 'lé.  
 Àtọkọọ rẹ, kọ ọ bọọ 'lé.  
 Àtádá tó o mú lọọ.  
 Kọ pẹ suun,
- 190 Ó lókòkóniyèlẹ abímọ mọ wàşẹ.  
 Òkòkó lóun náà nù un nì.  
 Hà! Tata lóun dágún.  
 Tóun sì sọ fọkùnrin yíí,  
 Kọ mọ dẹé ilé Adìẹ.
- 195 Ó sì şilèkùn fun.  
 Ngbà Adìẹ ọ bọọ núu 'lé,  
 Tí ó rí Tata,  
 Hààà! Ó ní Kankan,  
 Ó lọwẹẹ rẹ lí dùn.
- 200 Kín nìí, àdúáá gbà.  
 Ó jókòó lọtọ.  
 Kọ pẹ sàà.  
 Ó ní Ẹyọlọ, ọkọ àgbébbọ.  
 Kọlọkọlọ ní hòo.
- 205 Bíbọ tí ọ bọọ 'lé tán,  
 Ó fojú kan Adìẹ,  
 Hàà! Ó ní Kankan,

- 185 And he opened the door (like this door leading to  
 where we are now sitting),  
 And he told the Grasshopper; "Enter inside the  
 room,  
 With your hoe, enter inside,  
 Together with the cutlass which you are handling."  
 After a while,
- 190 He said, "Hen, mother of many chickens, who de-  
 livers her own children without blood".  
 And the Hen said, "Yes, it is me".  
 The Grasshopper exclaimed, "Ha! I am in trouble.  
 And I warned this man  
 Not to go to the Hen's house".
- 195 **Kankan** then opened the door for the Hen.  
 When the Hen entered into the house,  
 And saw the Grasshopper,  
 He shouted for joy saying, "Hààà! **Kankan**,  
 This your collective mannual work is a pleasant  
 one.
- 200 What is this ? My prayers have been answered".  
 He then sat down separately.  
 After a long time,  
~~K~~**kankan** said, "The stealthy one, husband of hens".  
 And the Wolf answered, "Thank you".
- 205 As soon as he entered into the house,  
 He saw the Hen.  
 He shouted for joy saying, "Hàà! **Kankan**,

- Ó ní nńkan dǎa dé lónń.   
 Ó dǎ ẹẹ, ọ là ẹẹ,
- 210 Ọ lǎǎ, ọmọ Oníwǎǎwǎ.   
 Kọlọkọlọ ní hàà!   
 Toun wí fọkúnrin yìi pé,   
 Kọ mọ bẹ kiní ìí lówẹ,   
 Ó sì wǎ,
- 215 Ọnà wo loun ọ wǎǎ gbé toun gbà lónń ?   
 Nígbà táǎ ọ bọ́lẹ́,   
 Ó fọjú kan Kọlọkọlọ,   
 Ó ní Kankan,   
 Ó ní nńkan yìi ha tí á dùn tó lónń ?
- 220 Ọun náà jókòó.   
 Ọ fọkọ ẹ 'ódò.   
 Kọ pé sàà,   
 Ó lómìnín,   
 Ìkòokòó ní hòò.
- 225 Ajá ẹu 'ára.   
 Kín loun kàn lónń ?   
 Kí 'Kòokò ọ bọ́lẹ́,   
 Ó fọjú kan Ajá,   
 Hàǎǎ! ó ní Kankan,
- 230 Ó ní wò ó,

Things will be very pleasant today.”

After some time,

210 **Kankan** said, “Dog, offspring of those who bark loudly”.

The Wolf said “hàà” in great terror and surprise.

He added, “And I told this man

Not to call this wicked one.

(But he has called him) and he too has responded.

215 What will I do now?”

When the Dog entered the house,

He saw the Wolf,

And said, “**Kankan**, I salute you.

How very pleasant is this day?”

220 He too sat down,

And kept his hoe very close to himself.

After a long time,

**Kankan** said, “The beautiful and fast-moving one”,

And the Hyena replied, “Thank you”.

225 The dog messed himself up with excreta as a result of fear.

He said, “What great danger have I met with today?”

As soon as the Hyena entered into the house,  
He saw the Dog,

And shouted in great Joy, “Hààà! **Kankan**,

230 Look here,

Ó ní kò ku òkan kan mò lóní.  
Ó ládùúàá gbà.  
Kò pẹ sàà,  
Ó lode Mònkólómò,

235 Ode ní híìn.  
Ode bọ́lẹ.  
Ó gbébon ẹ̀ tì.  
Ngbà tí ó wolẹ, ó fojú kan Ìkòokò,  
Ó ní hààà,

240 Hàà! Ó ní Kankan,  
Ó ní òkán dǎa dé lóní,  
Ògún ẹ̀ òkan.  
Kò pẹ sàà,  
Ó lóká, ọmọ Alápà níràwé.

245 Ode ní hùùn.  
Kíní ọ̀njàmbá lí,  
Tí ó sì tààyàn ńjambá,  
O ò ní kúkú rì.  
Írúu kìn lẹ̀yí lí?

250 Kankan lí hààà!  
Ọkǎ bọ́lẹ,  
Ní ńwo Ode.  
Ní ńfojú ìkǎá wò ó.

Today, there is nothing else I lack in my life.  
My prayers have been answered".  
After a long while,  
He said, "Hunter, nicknamed **Mò̀ǹkólómò̀**"

235 The hunter replied, "Yes, I am he".  
The hunter entered into the house,  
And rested his gun against the wall.  
When he looked at the floor, he saw the Hyena.  
He exclaimed in great joy, "Hàà !

240 **Kankan**, I salute you,  
Things are very pleasant today.  
**Ògún**<sup>6</sup> has done a good thing".  
After a very long time,  
He said, "Gaboon Viper, offspring of **Alápà** of  
the city of **Ìràwé**."

245 The hunter in fear said, "**Hùùn**.  
This very dangerous one,  
Who would put one's life in danger,  
And one would hardly see him.  
What a dangerous situation

250 This treacherous **Kankan** has put one into".  
The Gaboon Viper entered into the house,  
And started looking at the Hunter.  
He was looking at him with his wicked eyes,

Kò sàà fòhùn lónìí.

255 Kò pẹ sàà,  
Ó lópàá pejò mò jẹ.  
Ọpá ní hòo.  
Ìbọ́lẹ́ tí ọ bọ́lẹ́,  
Ó fójú kan Ọkà,

260 Ní nẖwò ó nílẹ kọ̀rọ̀.  
Ọlọ̀un jẹ kí kiní ìí ó le para dà.  
Kò dá ẹ, ọ là ẹ,  
Ó níná, ọmọ ọrara.  
Ọpá ní hàà !  
Tòun sì wí fọkùnrin ìí pẹ,  
Kò mò ẹ bẹ Iná.  
Ló sì á fiun sọfò lónìí ?  
Ọ pẹ sàà,  
Ó léjì.

270 Iná ní irúu kìn lòún wáá kàn lónìí ?  
Òún ó tí á bá nkan ìí já lónìí ?  
Ó di pé,  
Iná ò modó à á dọ̀unláá sí mò.

Kò pẹ tí tí tí tí,  
275 Ọ lódàá módò gbẹ.  
Ọdà ní hòo.

- Saying to himself, "If he ever says one word today".
- 255 After a long while,  
**Kankan** said, "Walking Stick, who kills snakes  
without eating them".  
The Walking Stick said, "Thank you".  
As soon as the Walking Stick entered into the  
house,  
He saw the Gaboon Viper,
- 260 And he started to look at the latter as a possible  
prey.  
He said to himself, "May God allow this thing to  
attempt moving away from his position"  
After a long time,  
**Kankan** said, "Fire, offspring of those who destroy  
with terrible heat".  
The Walking Stick said, "hà !" in great surprise.
- 265 He added, "And I told this man  
Not to call Fire.  
He has put my life in great peril today".  
After a while,  
He said, "The heavy down pour of rain".
- 270 Fire said, "What a great danger is this today?  
What will I do now?"  
The result was that  
Fire did not know what to do again.  
After a very very long time,
- 275 He said, "Drought who makes rivers dry up".  
And drought answered, "Thank you".



Gbogbo wọn á jókòó yípoo núu pàlọ̀ọ̀ rẹ̀.  
Kò dáná èkọ̀,  
Kò dáná ọkà,

280 Kò sì yànkọ̀ fún wọn.  
Ngbọ̀ọ̀ yá, tó rí pé ọ̀n péjú,  
Ó ní tóò,  
Ó léèyàan wa,  
Ó ní ẹ̀ jẹ́ á lọ̀ o.

285 Ní 'ọ̀n bá tẹ̀ lé e,  
Ó doko.  
Ó wá lẹ̀ọ̀ tò wọn m̀bí ilẹ̀ tí ọ̀ pa.  
Ó fí Tata kángun ààlà,  
Ó fAdiẹ̀ tí í.

290 Ó fí Kòlẹ̀kòlẹ̀ tadiẹ̀.  
Ó mú Ajá ọ̀ fí tí Kòlẹ̀kòlẹ̀.  
Ó fíkòokò tí Ajá.  
Ó fí Ọ̀dẹ̀ t̀l̀kookò.  
Ó fí Ọ̀ká, ọ̀ fí tí Ọ̀dẹ̀.

295 Ó fí Ọ̀pá tí Ọ̀ká.  
Ó fí Iná tí Ọ̀pá.  
Ó fí Ọ̀jò, ọ̀ fí tí Iná.  
Ó fí Ọ̀dà, ọ̀ fí tí Ọ̀jò.  
Ó f̀l̀rìwòwò kángun ààlà.

- All of them sat round his sitting room.  
 He did not prepare ẹkọ,  
 Neither did her pepare ọkà,
- 280 And he did not buy solid ẹkọ for them.<sup>8</sup>  
 After some time, when he saw that they were all  
 present,  
 He said to them, "Alright,  
 My friends,  
 Let us go now."
- 285 And they followed him.  
 When he got to the farm,  
 He lined them up against the overgrown farm-  
 land he wanted to clear.  
 He placed the Grasshopper near the edge of the  
 farm,  
 And placed the Hen next to him.
- 290 He placed the Wolf next to the Hen.  
 He placed the Dog next to the Wolf.  
 He placed the Hyena next to the Dog.  
 He placed the Hunter next to the Hyena.  
 He placed the Gaboon Viper next to the Hunter.
- 295 He placed the Walking Stick next to the Gaboon  
 Viper.  
 He placed Fire next to the Walking Stick.  
 He placed Rain next to Fire.  
 He placed Drought next to Rain.  
 And he placed Dew-drops on the other edge of the  
 farm.

- 300 Ọ dá ẹ, ọ là ẹ,  
 Kò sunṣu,  
 Kò gúnyán,  
 Kò sì yànkọ lọ látilé.  
 Àílàá fi ńtọ,
- 305 Ọgbọ yá, Tatá yán hòò,  
 Ó ní hùùn,  
 Ọwẹẹ Kankan yii,  
 Irúu kín a wáá nì?  
 Ebí sì dé.
- 310 Adìẹ ní ènmọ kín a tiẹ nì,  
 Ègbín kín a tiẹ la rí.  
 Hùn! Pàkà!  
 Hiiìn, Kòlọkọlọ ní tóò!  
 Tóun ti ńmú un mọra.
- 315 Kíkì ló kì Adìẹ.  
 Ọgbà tí ó e ẹ hiiọ tán,  
 Ajá bo Kòlọkọlọ.  
 Ìkòokòó bo Ajá.  
 Ọdẹ pàdí dà,
- 320 Kààà.  
 Kòdẹ ó poun ó mìnrin 'éyìn,  
 Ẹkà, Ọkà sọ ọ.

- 300 After some time,  
 (It became apparent) that he did not prepare  
 roasted yams,  
 Neither did he prepare pounded yam,  
 And he did not buy lumps of solid **ẹkọ** from home,  
 Up till the hour of **Àlà**.
- 305 After a while, the Grasshopper yawned loudly,  
 And said in despair, "**Hùùn**,  
 This collective mannual work of **Kankan**,  
 What a strange thing it is?  
 Hunger has come".
- 310 To which the Hen replied, "What a delicate situa-  
 tion?  
 What an insult have I seen?"  
 The Hen then struck the Grasshopper suddenly.  
 The Wolf said in amazement, "**Toò!**  
 I have only been trying to restrict myself".
- 315 He then pounced on the Hen.  
 Before the Hen shouted "**híọ**",  
 The Dog pounced on the Wolf;  
 The Hyena pounced on the Dog;  
 The Hunter shifted his position,
- 320 And shot his gun "**kààà**".  
 But as the Hunter moved backwards,  
 The Gaboon Viper bit him suddenly.

Ngbà tí Ọká é e para dà,  
Ọpá, i fà.

325 Iná sẹ̀ ndìí ọpá,  
Kọ́ dá sẹ, ọ́ là sẹ,  
Ó di pé Ọjó dé.  
Ó sẹ 'ná ráú.  
Ó di pé Ọdá dé.

330 Gbogbo wọn wá para wọn dà á lẹ.  
Ó kùrìwọ̀wọ̀ nìkan.  
Bọ́ bá sàréé hìin, yọ́ọ sàáré 'ọhùún,  
Kankán wáá lẹ́ọ dúò lẹ́ọkán.  
Ní ñwò wọn.

335 Irúu kìn wa nì ?  
Káwọn ọ wáá kú báí ?  
Kí gbogbo nkan, ogun ó sì á dé láàrìin wọn.  
Òún ó tí á sẹ báyyí ?  
Kankan tò dá nkaán 'lẹ,

340 Òun náà ndààmú.  
Ìrìwọ̀wọ̀, bọ́ bá sáá hìin, yọ́ọ lọ ọhún.  
Ngbọ́ yá, ọ gbóròo baba è kalẹ.  
Wẹ, wẹ, wẹ, wẹ, wẹ, wẹ, wẹ, wẹ.  
Gbogboo wọn tí ọn sọraa wọn dolókùnrun lẹhùún,

345 Ngbà ìrì sẹ pa wọn,

- Before the Gaboon Viper himself moved away,  
The Walking Stick struck him with full force.
- 325 Fire came out of the Walking Stick's bottom end.  
Before long,  
Rain started to fall,  
And it put out the Fire immediately.  
The result was that Drought started.
- 330 All of them killed one another all over the place,  
It remained only Dew-Drops.  
If it ran this way, it would run that way.  
**Kankan** himself stood away at a distance,  
Looking at them.
- 335 Dew-drops exclaimed, "What a terrible thing  
this is.  
Will all of us perish like this?  
As a result of war and all bad things.  
What will I do now?"  
**Kankan** himself who caused all the trouble,
- 340 Also became worried.  
Dew-drops was moving from one place to the  
other.  
After some time, he started his ancestors' tradi-  
tional rites.  
He started to drop and drop persistently.  
All of them who had become half-dead,
- 345 When Dew dropped upon them,

Ó di pé wọn ñwọ́ dide lẹ̀kọ̀ọ̀kan.  
Wọn ñwọ́ dide lẹ̀kọ̀ọ̀kan.  
Èyí tí ò tii kú tán ñdide,  
Tóó ! Awo ni wọn wáá bèrẹ̀ síi yìn.

350 Pé hààà !

Kàkà àwọn ọ̀ mọ̀ jẹ́ẹ̀wẹ̀.  
Ífá wí pọ̀wẹ̀ yówù eléyiun lẹ̀ ẹ̀,  
Ìşẹ̀wẹ̀ ilẹ̀ àna,  
Ìşẹ̀wẹ̀ oko ríro,

355 Eléyiun ọ̀ gbọ̀dọ̀ báàyàn jẹ́wẹ̀.

Kọ̀ mọ̀ ẹ̀ pé mbi ọ̀wẹ̀ náà logún ó gbẹ̀é dé.  
Ogun ó sì mú un mọ̀ ọ̀n.  
Ó ní bèẹ̀ gẹ́gẹ̀ ní àwọn awo òún ñşẹ̀nu rere  
Tí 'ọ̀n fi ñpe 'Fá.

360 Ogbèdí ká káá ká,

Ogbèdí kun kuun kun.  
Gànmùgànmùu rẹ̀ ọ̀ mọ̀ baà ẹ̀ hàn,  
Kọ̀ mọ̀ baà ta jáde.  
Dífá fún Kankan.

365 Èyí tí ọ̀ lọ̀ rẹ̀é bẹ̀ Tata lẹ̀wẹ̀,

Yóó sì bẹ̀ Adie lẹ̀wẹ̀.  
Yóó sì bẹ̀ Kọ̀lẹ̀kọ̀lẹ̀,  
Yọ̀ọ̀ bAjá.

They started to get up one by one.  
They were getting up one by one.  
Those who were not completely dead, started to  
get up,  
They all started to praise their Ifá priests.

- 350 Saying “hàáà” in great surprise,  
And regretting that they went for the collective  
work.  
Ifá says that if this person is invited for collective  
work,  
Whether it involved manual work in an in-law's  
place,  
Or if it involved hoeing a farm,

- 355 This person must not participate in any collective  
work.  
So as to avoid the possibility of being involved in  
a riot or warfare  
In which he would be enslaved.  
They said that was exactly how their Ifá priests  
employed their good voices  
In praise of Ifá.

- 360 ‘Ogbèdí, the rugged one,  
Ogbèdí, the very strong one;  
Wrap it up very well and prevent its hooks from  
appearing outside,  
Prevent them from shooting out.  
Ifá divination was performed for **Kankan**

- 365 Who would go and ask the Grasshopper for  
collective manual work on his farm.  
He would also ask the Hen for the same obligation.  
He would ask the Wolf,  
He would ask the Dog.



- Yọọ bẹ Kookò,
- 370 Yọọ bỌdẹ.  
 Yóó sì bẹ Ọká,  
 Yọọ bẹ Ọpá,  
 Yọọ bẹ Iná,  
 Yọọ bẹ Ọjò.
- 375 Yóó sì bẹ Ọjò tán,  
 Yọọ bỌdá.  
 Yọọ bẹ Ịrìwọwọ kányiin wọn.  
 Kankán wáá bayé jẹ lónlì o,  
 Ịrìwọwọ wáá tun ẹ.
- 380 Ọ di pé,  
 Ịgbà tí ibi dire tán,  
 Tírìwọwọ sẹ palẹ,  
 Tó di pé nkán wáá dùn,  
 Àwọn ọn yọọ ha nàwó ewu tó wu àwọn yìi ?
- 385 Wọn nàwó tán,  
 Wọn sọpá sàrán,  
 Ní nmú tinúu rẹẹ jáde.  
 Wọn n̄se, “Ịrìwọwọ wáá tun ẹ o ò,  
 Ịrìwọwọ wáá tun ẹ.
- 390 Ẹ ẹ rí Kankan tọ bayé jẹ lónlì o,  
 Ịrìwọwọ wáá tun ẹ o o”

- He would ask the Hyena,  
370 He would ask the Hunter.  
He would ask the Gaboon Viper,  
He would ask the Walking Stick.  
He would ask Fire,  
He would ask Rain.
- 375 After asking Rain,  
He would ask Drought,  
And he would ask Dew-drops last of them all.  
**Kankan** has spoilt the world today,  
Dew-drops, come and make amends.”
- 380 The result was that  
After bad turned into good,  
After Dew had dropped all over the ground,  
And things became pleasant again,  
They all wanted to spend money to celebrate their  
escape from danger.
- 385 They spent money to feast people,  
And they applied drum-stick to **àràn**,  
And it started to bring forth its pleasant melodies.  
They were saying, “Dew-drops, come and make  
repairs.  
Dew-drops, come and make amends.
- 390 Don’t you see how **Kankan** has spoilt the world.  
Dew-drops, come and make repairs.

## NOTES

1. **Ogbèdì.** One of the minor two-hundred-and-forty categories of the Ifá divination system known as “**Ọmọ Odù**” (Junior Odù). It derives its name from a combination of **Ogbè** and **Ọdì**.
2. **Kankan.** Probably a name of an animal. Literally, it also means “by force”.
3. The collective manual work referred to here is known in Yoruba as **ọwẹ** and is a regular feature of Yoruba rural and agricultural life. Someone who has been ill can, for example, call his friends and neighbours to help him weed his farm on an appointed day. He is responsible for their food and drinks after the work. One can also call one’s fellow villagers for the same obligation when one wants to roof one’s house or to do any other type of work. It is the responsibility of a person who is married to one’s daughter or has been betrothed to her to arrange **ọwẹ** to clear one’s farm whenever it is overgrown. Such **ọwẹ** is known as “**ọwẹ ànà**” (collective manual work on an in-law’s farm).
4. **Mòhókólómọ.** This praise-name is given to all hunters. The meaning of the name is obscure.
5. **Alápà.** King of **Àpà.** The Gaboon-Viper’s praise name is “offspring of **Alápà.**” The **Alápà** are indeed a lineage with their own stock of praise poetry and the Gaboon Viper is one of their sacred animals.
6. “**Ọgún** has done a good thing.” Every hunter believes that **Ọgún**, his **òrisha** whom he worships, will make available for him in the forest, suitable animals to kill at every hunting expedition.
7. **Ìrāwé.** An **Ọyọ** town usually mentioned in oral poetry.

8. All the items of food mentioned here — liquid **ẹkọ** (made from maize starch), solid **ẹkọ** (also made from maize starch), and **ọkà** (made from yam-flour) are characteristic **Ọyọ-Yoruba** early-morning food. A farmer eats one of them almost every morning for his breakfast.
9. **Àlilà**. A Muslim prayer said around 2 p.m. in the afternoon.

## APPENDIX I.

### IFÁ PRIESTS' TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION TO THE POEMS

The sixteen poems in this collection are taken from the following Odù :

- i. ÌWÒRÌ MÉJÌ
- ii. ÌROSÚÚGBÈMÍ
- iii. ỌYÈKÚ MÉJÌ
- iv. ÌDÍGBÈ
- v. ỌGÚNDÁ MÉJÌ
- vi. OGBÈGÚNDÁ
- vii. ỌBÀRÀ MÉJÌ
- viii. ỌBÀRÀ MÉJÌ
- ix. ỌSÁ MÉJÌ
- x. ỌSÁ MÉJÌ
- xi. ỌSÁ MÉJÌ
- xii. ỌFÚN MÉJÌ
- xiii. ỌWỌNRÍNSOGBÈ
- xiv. OGBÈHÚNLÉ
- xv. OGBÈWÈYÌN
- xvi. OGBÈDÍ

Eni tí ó dá Ìwòrì Méjì, Ifá sọ wí pé ọmọ méjọ ni ọmọ tí yóó bí; gbogbo àwọn ọmọ náà ní ó sì ní àlùbá-ríkà. Sùgbọ́n tí àbíkẹ̀yìn wọn ni yóó pọ̀ ju tí gbogbo àwọn yòókù lọ. Sùgbọ́n nígbà tí àbíkẹ̀yìn náàá bá dàgbà tán, kò níi mọ baba rẹ sí ònkankan mọ. Àbíkẹ̀yìn yìi ní ó ẹ̀ é tí ẹnìkàn nínú ẹ̀bí náà ó fi lọ sí òkèèrè lọ dúró sí. Àwọn ọmọ iyókù ó maa lọ sọpẹ wí pé kí ó padà wá silẹ, sùgbọ́n kò níi bọ sí i mọ. Kí eléyìi ó máa rọ̀jú nítorí pé tìṣẹ̀tìyà ni yóó fi wo àwọn ọmọ méjèjọ náà. Ibùjókòó ó gba eléyìi gbẹ̀yìn ayée rẹ. Ifá rí ire nípasẹ̀ ọlá fún eléyìi sùgbọ́n wọn ñrò ó pin ní isinsinyìi wí pé kò leè jẹ ònkankan. Kádàráa rẹ sọ wí pé òun ñrẹ̀rìin àwọn tí ó níwí bẹ̀. Kí ó lọ fi ẹ̀yẹ̀lé m̀erindínlógún ẹ̀ sàráà pẹ̀lúu sílẹ̀ m̀erindínlógún, eku m̀erindínlógún, ẹja m̀erindínlógún, ìgàn aṣọ kan. Kí ó lọ fi àgbẹ̀bọ̀ adìẹ̀ bọ Ifá. Kí ó fi àgbọ̀n m̀eta àti obì m̀eta bọ orí araa rẹ.

Ifá says that the person to whom Ìwòrì Méjì appears during the process of divination would give birth to eight children, and all the eight children shall be prosperous. Ifá says that the youngest of them shall, however, be the most prosperous of them all. But when the youngest son becomes an adult, he would cease to give due respect to their father. The same youngest son shall cause a member of the family to leave home to stay in a foreign land. The rest of the children would fruitlessly pray him to return home. Ifá warns that the client should persevere because he would train his children under great hardship. Ifá, however, says that the client would finally achieve success in life but people are at present deriding him saying that he could not achieve anything in life. But

Ifá says that his Maker is laughing at such people. This person should perform sacrifice with sixteen pigeons, sixteen times four thousand cowries, sixteen rats, sixteen fish and a bundle of cloth. He should also offer a big hen to Ifá. He should also offer three coconuts and three kolanuts to his own **Orí**.

(ii)

Ifá wí pé ire ni òún sú, òun kò súbi. Ifá wí pé òun ó jẹẹ kí ayé yẹ eléyíí. Ifá wí pé kí eléyíí ó lọ rúbọ àti pé obìnrin tí eléyíí ní, méjì ni wọn. Ifá sọ wí pé eléyíí ní nńkan tí ó fi ńrìn, yálà ọkọ tàbí ẹşin ni. Ifá wí pé ayé ó yẹ eléyíí pípòpípò, sùgbọn ẹbọ ni kí ó rú. Ifá wí pé bí ó ti rúbọ, bẹẹ ni kí ẹgbọn rẹ náà ó rú. Ifá ní gbogbo bí wọn bá ti tó nínúu mọlẹbí wọn ni kí wọn ó ẹ rúbọ tó. Ifá ní kí wọn ó rúbọ ipẹ̀ndà, tí ó ku ọwọ́ wọn, tí babaa wọn yóó fọ́jọ sàisí. Ifá wí pé ire ọmọ mẹtáá wà fún eléyíí. Ifá sọ wí pé obìnrin kán sì wà tí ó fẹ̀ràn owú jìjẹ pípò, kí wọn ó kilọ́ fún un, kí ó má sọ araa rẹ lóókọ.

Ifá says that he sees fortune and no misfortune at all for this person. Ifá says he would make this person to lead a honourable life. Ifá says that the client should perform sacrifice. This person has two wives. Furthermore, Ifá says that this client has either a vehicle or a horse with which he moves about. Ifá says that this person would lead a good and honourable life but he should perform sacrifice. His brother should perform sacrifice, as well as all members of their family. They should perform sacrifice against the time when their father would die and leave them behind. Ifá also forecasts that this person shall have three children. Finally,

Ifá says that there is a certain woman in the clients home, who indulges in inordinate jealousy; she should be warned, otherwise, she would earn herself a bad reputation.

(iii)

Ẹni tí ó dá Ọyèkú Méjì, Ifá sọ pé kí ó má ẹ fi inú han obìnrin rẹ nítorí wí pé òun ní ó pa á. Ifá sọ wí pé òún rí ire àìkú àti ìṣẹgun fún un. Ifá rí ire oyè fún un àti ire ọmọ àti ire obìnrin pẹlú. Ifá sọ wí pé ayé nífi í pípọ, yóò ẹgun; ẹ̀gbọ́n kí ó má ẹ ẹ̀kà. Ifá sọ wí pé kí ó bọ ẹyáa rẹ, kí ó ta arúgbó lẹrẹ. Ayé níyí i í poo wí pé àwọn ó pa á. Ifá sọ pé kí ó tọ́jú ẹ̀ṣu akọ, kí ó fi ẹ sàràà; àti ẹ̀ṣu ewùrà àti ẹ̀ṣu kókò. Ifá sọ wí pé òun kò ní ẹ́ kí ogun ó le jà á o.

The person to whom Ọyèkú Méjì appears in the process of divination is warned not to confide in his wife otherwise she would cause his death. Ifá says there is prospect of long life and victory for him. Ifá also sees prospect of being installed as a chief and prospect of having wives and children as well. His enemies are at war with him. He would triumph over them but he should not engage in any wickedness against others. He is asked to offer sacrifice to his dead mother and to give alms to any aged person. He is surrounded by enemies who want to kill him. Ifá says that he should offer sacrifice with hard yam, water yam and cocoyam. Ifá promises that he would not allow evil forces to run him down.



(iv)

Ènì tí ó dá Ìdìngbè, Ifá wí pé kí ó rúbọ́ dáadáa. Ifá wí pé òun kò ní jẹ́ kí ó kú, òun ò sì ní jẹ́ kí ó rùn. Ifá wí pé àmọ́ kí ó mò pé íkú ñwá òun kiri bá yí nìisilín. Ifá wí pé sàànsààn ní ñwá á kiri. Ifá ní kí ó yára kó a á lóowó, a á lẹ́rẹ̀ tì sì ègbẹ́ kan ná. Ifá ní kí ó rúbọ́ ikú, lẹ́yìn èyí ní ó tòó wáá kan owó. Ifá wí pé obìnrin kan ó ẹ́ é lóore àti pé ní isilín obìnrin náà kò tìlì mò ọ́n. Ifá ní obìnrin náà, onírúnmọ́lẹ̀ àti abàmi èyàn ni pẹ̀lú. Ifá ní kí ó mò fojú dí í, nítorí pé yóó ẹ́ é ní oore. Ifá ní obìnrin yí ní ó ko o là nínú ikú pẹ̀lú.

The person to whom **Idìngbè** appears in the process of divination is told to perform plenty of sacrifice. Ifá promises that he would not allow him to die and he would not allow him to fall ill, but he should realise that death is seriously and desperately seeking him about. He is warned to abandon for the time being, consideration of amassing wealth and property. He should first of all perform sacrifice to ward-off death and after that he would become prosperous. Ifá says that a certain woman will be his beneficiary but he does not know her as yet. Ifá says that the woman is an ardent devotee of the divinities and she is a mysterious person. He should not look down on her because she would be a helper to him. In fact, the woman would save him from death.

(v)

Ènì tí ó dá Ògúndá Méjì, Ifá ní kí ó máa ọ́ orí rẹ̀. Kí ó lọ rú ẹ̀yẹ́lé méjọ àti ẹgbàá mèrìndínlógún. Ifá ní bí ó bá mọ́ orí araa rẹ̀, ayée rẹ̀ ó dàára.

The person to whom **Ògúndá Méjì** appears in the process of divination is asked to offer sacrifice to his **Orí**. He should offer eight pigeons and sixteen times four thousand cowries for sacrifice. Ifá says if he offers sacrifice to his **Orí** always, his life would be good.

(vi)

Eni tí ó dá Ogbègúndá, ẹbọ nì kí olúwaarẹ ó rú kí ipiín rẹ ó lè bàá dǎá. Kí ó rúbọ dǎadǎá. Kí ó ní ẹgbàafà ní ẹbọ, kí ó ní ẹgbínrín iyọ mẹta, kí ó rúbọ náà tán, kí ó mọ sì kǎnjú. Gbogbo ẹni tí ó bá jù ú lọ, tí wọn bá nṣe nṣkankan lówọ, kí eléyíí ó máa ràn wọn lówọ, tàbí kí ó máa júbàa gbogbo ẹni tí ó bá jù ú lọ.

The person to whom **Ogbègúndá** appears should offer sacrifice in order that he might make a good choice of destiny. He is advised to make plenty of sacrifice. He is asked to offer six times two thousand cowries and three bags of salt as sacrifice, and to wait patiently — not to hurry unduly. He should always help any person older than he whenever that person is doing something and he should give due respect to the elders.

(vii)

Ifá ní bí ó bá ẹ pé àlejò ló wǎá bèèrè, kí ó má tiìlì lọ sí ilée rẹ nítorí pé nkan tí yóó bàá nilé kò níi dǎra. Ifá ní kí eléyíí ó rú ọkẹ mẹfà àti ewúré kan. Ifá ní ọmọ mẹfà ní m̀tẹ nínú obìnrín tí eléyíí fẹ́ fẹ́. Ifá ní kí eléyíí ó rúbọ kí ó pé o, kí obìnrín náà ó má bíi ọmọ mẹta fún àlè nínú àwọn ọmọ mẹfẹ́fẹ́fà náà. Ifá ní kí eléyíí ó má hùwà èké sí àwọn aṣiwájú lénú isẹ.

Ifá says if the person for whom this Ifá divination is made has come from a distant place, he should not return home yet because what he would find on arrival at home would not be pleasant. He should offer six times twenty thousand cowries and a goat for sacrifice. Ifá says that the wife that this person will marry shall have six children. He should perform all the sacrifices prescribed for him so that the woman may not have three of the six children for her concubines. The client should avoid any act of disloyalty or deceit to any of his superiors in his place of work.

(viii)

Ifá ní òún rí ire fún ẹnì tí ó dá Ọ̀bàrà Mèjì. Ifá ní kí ó rú ewúré kan àti ọ̀kẹ̀ mẹ̀wàá. Ifá ní kí ó rú ahó ọ̀tí kan àti ẹ̀yẹ́lé mẹ̀jọ, kí ó rú eja mẹ̀jì, ìgbín mẹ̀jì. Ifá ní kí eléyìí ó máa tẹ̀lé Ifá. Ifá ní kí ó má gbèé ẹ̀sẹ̀ ju òun lọ o. Ifá ní kii ẹ̀ òun nìkan ní òún m̀báá wí. Ifá ní ẹnìkan m̀bẹ̀ tí wọn ńkọ onnú nípa ẹ̀. Ifá ní kí wọn ó fi gbogbo ohun tí wọn rú náà bọ̀ òun. Ifá ní eléyìí fẹ́ẹ̀ lọ ibìkan, kí ó rúbọ̀ kí ó má kan àdánwò tí ó jù ú lọ nìbẹ̀.

Ifá says that he sees prospects of fortune for the person to whom Ọ̀bàrà Mèjì appears. He is asked to offer one goat and ten times twenty thousand cowries for sacrifice. He should also offer one keg of guinea-corn beer and eight pigeons for sacrifice. In addition he is to offer two pieces of fish and two snails. The client is advised to be a stunch worshipper of Ifá, and he should never do anything without Ifá's instruction. Ifá says he is not limiting his message to the client alone and that the message also extends to someone

about whom they are worried. All the sacrifice should be given to Ifá. Ifá finally states that the client is contemplating on going somewhere. To avoid an impending danger there, he should offer sacrifice.

(ix)

Ifá ní eléyìí mǎbá ẹnìkàán foríí gbárí. Ifá ní kí ó ẹ̀ sùúrù o. Ifá ní kí ó rú òrúkọ kan, àti òkẹ̀ mẹ̀ta. Ifá ní yóó ẹ̀ere fún èyàn, ẹ̀yàbọ̀n ibi ní wọn ó fí sù u. Ifá ní ọ̀dà ó dàá pípọ̀ láàrin ọ̀dún tí a dá Ifá yìí, yóó di wí pé a ẹ̀sẹ̀ ńrúbọ̀ kí ọ̀jò ó tóó rọ̀. Ifá ní kí wọn ó rúbọ̀ fún aboyun àti àgàn. Ifá ní ẹnìkan m̀bẹ̀ tí kò gbádùn, kí wọn ó rúbọ̀ fún un, kí ó má bàà kú.

Ifá says that this person is engaging in a struggle or competition with another person. Ifá says that he should have a lot of patience. He should offer a he-goat and three times twenty thousand cowries as sacrifice. Ifá says that he will do good to someone but he will be repaid with evil. Ifá predicts that there will be lack of rain during the year when this Ifá is cast and people will be forced to perform sacrifice before rain falls. They should perform sacrifice on behalf of a pregnant woman and a barren woman. There is someone who is not well, they should offer sacrifice for him so that he might not die.

(x)

Ifá ní kí eléyìí ó rúbọ̀ o. Ifá ní kí eléyìí ó má ẹ̀ ojú àànú mọ̀. Bí ó bá ńse ojú àànú, èyàn ó bẹ̀ ẹ̀ lówẹ̀, yóó sì yí i lówọ̀. Ifá ní yóó ẹ̀ èyàn ní oore ẹ̀yàbọ̀n ibi ní wọn ó fí sù u. Ifá ní tàbí àrùn ikùn kan ní mǎbá

eléyí jà, kí ó mò pé àwọn iyámi ní o. Ifá ní ó rú ọkẹ méje àti ewúré kan, wọn sì gbọdọ fi gbogbo nkan inú ẹran náà pèèsè ní. Ifá ní kí ó rú epo àti ọpọlọpọ ẹkọ.

This client is warned to perform sacrifice. He is warned to stop being kind to people indiscriminately because someone will seek an obligation from him and this will land him in trouble. Ifá says the client will show kindness to someone but he shall be repaid with evil. If this client is suffering from a disease of the stomach he should know that the witches are responsible for it. He should offer seven times twenty-thousand cowries and a goat for sacrifice. The internal part of the goat should be used to prepare a special sacrifice for the witches. He should also offer palm-oil and plenty of ẹkọ (solid maize pudding) as sacrifice.

(xi)

Ifá ní òun rí ijà ẹlẹyẹ fún ẹni tí ó dá Ọsá Méjì. Ifá ní kí gbogbo ilé náà ó dájó jọ, kí wọn ó fi rúbọ. Ifá ní kí wọn ó ra ewúré, kí wọn ó fi ifuun rẹ pèèsè fún àwọn iyámi. Ifá ní kí wọn ó ní ọkẹ owó mífà, kí wọn ó sì gbé epo sí ọde. Ifá ní ẹyọ obìnrin kan soṣo náà ní ó sẹ àwọn iyámi.

Ifá says that he sees an impending attack of the witches for the person to whom Ọsá Méjì appears during divination. Ifá says all members of the client's household should contribute money to perform the prescribed sacrifice. They should buy a goat and offer its intestines as sacrifice to the witches. In addition, they should offer six times twenty thousand cowries

and palm-oil for sacrifice. The palm-oil should be placed outside. Ifá says that only one woman has offended the witches in the household.

(xii)

Ifá ní eléyí ní ọrẹ buburú kan. Ní ọjọ tí ó bá jáde nílẹ̀ ní ọrẹ̀ rẹ̀ náà ó ba ọ̀dẹ̀ rẹ̀ jẹ. Kí ó kílò fún àwọn èyàan rẹ̀ kí wọn ó mọ̀ sọ̀rọ̀ isọ̀kúso, kí wọn ó mọ̀ rẹ̀rín irínkúrín.

This person has one wicked friend. It is on the very day this person leaves his home (to go on a journey) that his friend will ruin his home. He should warn his people to be mindful of what they say and never to laugh indiscriminately.

(xiii)

Eni tí ó dá Ọ̀wónrínsogbè, Ifá sọ pé eléyí kò dá ikú bẹ̀ẹ̀ ní kò dá àrùn. Ifá sọ pé ọ̀rọ̀ siànsiàn ni òun wáá bá a sọ. Ifá wí pé kí ó rúbọ̀ dádáá. Ifá wí pé nńkan rẹ̀ yóó dùn. Ifá wí pé ohun tí eléyí bèèrè sí, ó fẹ́ẹ̀ ẹ̀ àyípadà nńkankan ni. Nńkan àtayébáyé sì ni nńkan náà. Ifá sọ wí pé ó fẹ́ẹ̀ ẹ̀ àyípadà rẹ̀ ni ó pe babaláwo sí. Ifá sọ pé iṣẹ̀ náà sòro sùgbọn awo ó ẹ̀ é. Ifá sọ pé kí òun náà ó má wójú owó, kí ó má ṣahun owó.

For the person to whom Ọ̀wónrínsogbè appears in the process of divination, Ifá says there is neither death nor illness but there is an important message for him. He should perform plenty of sacrifice and all shall be well with him. Ifá says the client is proposing to change

something traditional to a new location, and that is why he has consulted Ifá. The thing which he wants to do is difficult but his Ifá priests will do it for him. But the client should also be prepared to spend money. He should not behave like a miser at all.

(xiv)

Eni tí ó dá Ogbèhúnlé, Ifá wí pé eléyí kò dá ikú bẹ̀ẹ̀ ní kò dá àrùn. Ifá wí pé ọ̀rọ̀ siànsiàn ní òún wáá ba a sọ. Ifá wí pé ìgbín márùún ní kí ó mú lọ sí ọ̀dọ̀ Ọ̀ṣàálá kí ó lọ fi bọ ọ. Ifá wí pé obìnrin kan nù un, ojú ọmọ ní ńpọn ọn. Ifá sọ pé ojọ márùún ní kí ó fi bọ Ọ̀ṣàálá. Ifá ní bí ó bá lè ẹ̀ bẹ̀ẹ̀, a jẹ́ wí pé ọmọ dádáa ní yóó bíí. Ifá sọ wí pé ìgbóná-ara ní obìnrin yí fi ńwá ọmọ. Ifá sọ wí pé bí kò bá lè ẹ̀ bẹ̀ẹ̀, a jẹ́ wí pé iwin ọmọ ní ó bíí. Ifá ní tí òun ó bàá jẹ́ hiin m̀bẹ̀, adie márùún ní kí ó fi rúbọ, àti ọ̀kẹ́ márùún, kí ó sì tójú ìgbín márùún. Ifá ní kí ó tójú ọ̀bẹ̀ ọ̀síki àti j́yán, kí ó yára lọ sí ọ̀dọ̀ Ọ̀ṣàálá. Ifá ní tí ó bá dé ọ̀dọ̀ Ọ̀ṣàálá ní ojọ klíní, kí ó sọ wí pé kí ọ̀ṣà ó bun òun ní ọmọ ʼre. Ifá ní ọ̀ṣà funfun ní o, àti pé ọ̀ṣà yí wà ní ìran eni tí ó dáfá yí, yálà nílẹ̀ ọ̀kọ̀ tàbí ní ìdílẹ̀ babaa rẹ. Ifá ní tí ó bá tún dijọ kejì, kí ó mú ìgbín kan kí ó fi bọ ọ̀ṣà, kí ó wí pé kí ó bun òun lómọ ʼre. Tó bà tún dí ojọ kẹta àti ojọ kẹrin kí ó lẹ́ bọ ọ, kí ó wí pé kí ó bun òun ní ọmọ ʼre. Ifá wí pé tí ó bá dijọ kaàrún tí yóó lẹ́ bọ ọ, kí ó kààn kàn ìgbín náà pọ́n, láí fọhùn rárá. Ifá ní kí ó wí pé jẹ́ kí ó dára foun o, kí ó sì dide nílẹ̀. Ifá kilọ̀ pé tí ó bá wí pé kí ó foun ní ọmọ alálùbá-rikà, èyí tí yóó ẹ̀nfaàní, ọmọkọmọ ní ó bíí. Ifá ní tí kò bá fi èyí kún un, ọmọ rere ní ó bíí.

To the person to whom **Ogbèhúnlé** appears during divination, **Ifá** says there is neither death nor illness but there is an important message for him. The client is asked to offer five snails as sacrifice to **Ọ̀ṣàálá**. **Ifá** says there is a woman who is badly in want of children. She is told to worship **Ọ̀ṣàálá** for complete five days, and that if she could do so, she would give birth to a good child. **Ifá** hints that she is desperately in search of children, but if she fails to worship **Ọ̀ṣàálá** as forecast, she would give birth to an enfant terrible. If the woman wants to succeed, she should offer hens, five times twenty thousand cowries and five snails. She should also prepare melon soup and pounded yam and offer all to **Ọ̀ṣàálá**. **Ifá** forecasts the birth of good children to the client. She is instructed, on getting to **Ọ̀ṣàálá** on the first day, to pray him for good children. **Ifá** emphasizes that by **Ọ̀ṣàálá**, he means **Ọ̀ṣàfunfun** (the Creation divinity) and that this divinity is worshipped either in her husband's or father's home. On the second day, she should as well go to **Ọ̀ṣàálá** with a snail for sacrifice and pray him for good children. On the third and fourth days, she should repeat the same thing. **Ifá** instructs that on the fifth day, she should just go to **Ọ̀ṣàálá** and break the snail and say, "Let it be well with me", and leave. It is emphasized that if she prays for good children on the fifth day, she would obviously give birth to bad children; but if nothing is said, she would get good children.

(xv)

Ènì tí ó dá Ogbèwèyìn, Ifá wí pé òún pé ire fún un o. Ire pípò ló sì sọ. Şùgbón gbogbo nńkan tí Èlédàá eléyiun wí, irò ló ńpè é. Kó yára lẹ̀ọ̀ bọ ẹgbẹ-òrun.



Ifá ní bí a ti ẹ ńse gbogbo àlàyée kádàráà rẹ fún un, yóó ẹ bí irọ ni; kò níi kà á kún òdodo rárá; àfigbà tí ó bá níri ìsìsẹ rẹ nàà ní ó tòò mò ọn ní ònkan.

Ifá ní kó wáá lọ mójú tò ọràan rẹ, kó sì tẹpele mò ọn dáadáa. Gbogbo ònkan tí Ifá ba ńsọ kí ó mò pé òdodo ló ńsọ, bẹẹ ni kò sì sí ònkan tí ó jẹ irọ ńbẹ. Ifá ní kí ó lẹlẹ ní sàráa. Ifá ní ewúré tí ó bímọ rí ọun ni ẹbọ rẹ. Ifá ní kí ó rú ọkẹ owó mètálá, epo, ẹkọ àti obì.

The person to whom **Ogbèwèyìn** appears, Ifá says he sees prospects of fortune for him. His fortune is plentiful. But this person thinks that all the forecasts made for him are all false. He should hasten to offer sacrifice to his comrades in heaven. Ifá says that as this person is being told his destiny, he would have no confidence in the forecast but will only believe when events turn out according to forecast.

Ifá warns the client to have more concern for his own personal affairs and that he shouldn't disregard whatever is forecast for him by Ifá as Ifá will tell the truth, and the truth only. The client should perform sacrifice with a goat that has given birth to young ones. Other items for sacrifice include thirteen times twenty thousand cowries, palm oil, **ẹkọ** (a solid food made out of maize) and kolanuts.

(xvi)

Ifá ní ẹnì tí ó dá Ogbèdí akọ èyàn ni, akọ èyàn ni o. Ifá ní kí wọ́n ó rúbọ fún un dáadáa kí ó má baà dá ònkan sílẹ. Ifá ní akọ èyàn pátápátá ni, kí ó má dàá ònkan sílẹ. Ifá ní bí eléyiun nàà bá ni Ifá bá sì ńbá á wí, a jẹ wí pé akọ èyàn ni. Ifá ní kò kọ ìjàn-gbọ́n bẹẹ ni kò kọ ẹwọ́n. Ifá ní kí èyàn ó sọra látí bá a

rìn pẹ̀lú. Ifá wí pé kí ó rúbọ́ dáadáa kí ó má baà dá ohun tí kò níí tán sílẹ̀. Ifá ní kí wọ̀n ó rúbọ́ Ọ̀gún m̀bẹ́ kí ó má di àkóràn-àkóbá.

Ifá says that the person to whom Ogbèdí appears during divination is a tough person indeed. Plenty of sacrifice should be made on his behalf so that he might not cause trouble. Ifá says that he is a very tough and troublesome person. The person about whom Ifá is speaking may or may not be the client himself but the person is so troublesome that he does not care to cause trouble or to go to jail. People should be very careful not to keep his company. He should perform plenty of sacrifice so that he may not cause a dangerous thing to happen which will continue to be remembered by people with regret. They should offer sacrifice to Ọ̀gún so that a dangerous thing may not spread all over the place.

## APPENDIX II

### INFORMANTS AND FIELD METHODS

All the poems in this work (with the exception of poem (vi) were collected from Oyedele Işola, an Ifá priest of Bẹẹşin Compound, Paakoyi, Qyọ. The fifteen poems were collected at various times between 1963 and 1970).

Poem (vi) was collected from Awotunde Aworinde of Qlóbẹdú Compound, Oşogbo.

Further details about these two Ifá priests as well as other informants now follow.

1. Alawonifa Animaşoun Oyedele Işola
  - a. Address : Ile Bẹẹşin, Paakoyi, Qyọ
  - b. Age : 48 years
  - c. Occupation : Ifa priest
  - d. Type of information : Oyedele chanted fifteen  
of the poems in this  
collection.
  - e. Place of Collection : Baàşì and Ońsà Com-  
pounds, Qyọ.
  - f. Date of Collection : Various times between  
1963 and 1970.
  - g. Mode of Collection : By tape recorder and  
sometimes also by dicta-  
tion.
2. Awotunde Aworinde
  - a. Address : Ile Qlóbẹdú, Oşogbo.
  - b. Age : 43 years
  - c. Occupation : Ifá Priest
  - d. Type of information : Awotunde Aworinde  
chanted the sixth poem  
in this collection:

- e. Place of Collection : 181, Bode Thomas Street,  
Surulere Lagos.
- f. Date of Collection : 11th — 13th of December  
1968.
- g. Mode of Collection : Information is available  
only on tape.

The following informants, all Ifá priests, supplied information on place names, personal names of Ifá priests, Ifá divination instruments and other general information which have been of immense benefit in writing the introduction and the footnotes.

- 3. Adejare Kekere-Awo
  - a. Address : Ile Bẹẹşin, Paakoyi, Oyo.
  - b. Age : 33 years.
  - c. Date of Collection : Various times between  
1966 and 1972.
  - d. Mode of Collection : Information is available  
both on tape and in  
writing.
- 4. Fatooki Babalawo.
  - a. Address : Apini, Oyo
  - b. Age : 48 years.
  - c. Date of Collection : July 1 — 6, 1972
  - d. Mode of Collection : Information is available  
in writing.

It will be observed that most of the informants who supplied the material on which this work is based are from the important Yoruba cities of Oyo and Oşogbo. I made several trips to these two cities during the course of my research. Most of the information supplied were recorded on conventional Sanyo solid state tape

recorder supplied by the School of African and Asian Studies of the University of Lagos.

Some of these tapes were transcribed by my Research Assistant, Mr. Bade Ajuwón, who is now a Folklore postgraduate student at Indiana University, U.S.A. I personally transcribed some of the poems and checked through all the transcription.

The orthography adopted is a phonemic orthography which allows as much as possible for adequate representation of all the recorded phonemic sounds.

The translation is based on a free but not entirely literal approach keeping to the sense of the Yoruba original as much as possible. This allows some of the devices used in the Yoruba original to come up to the surface in the English version. This means however that good, idiomatic English cannot always be used in the translation. This method of translation is mid-way between a purely literal and a free translation.

Difficult or meaningless Yoruba words as well as personal and place names in the Yoruba original are explained in the footnotes at the end of each poem. Since Ifá is a very ancient literary corpus, it is not surprising that there are many such words in the footnotes

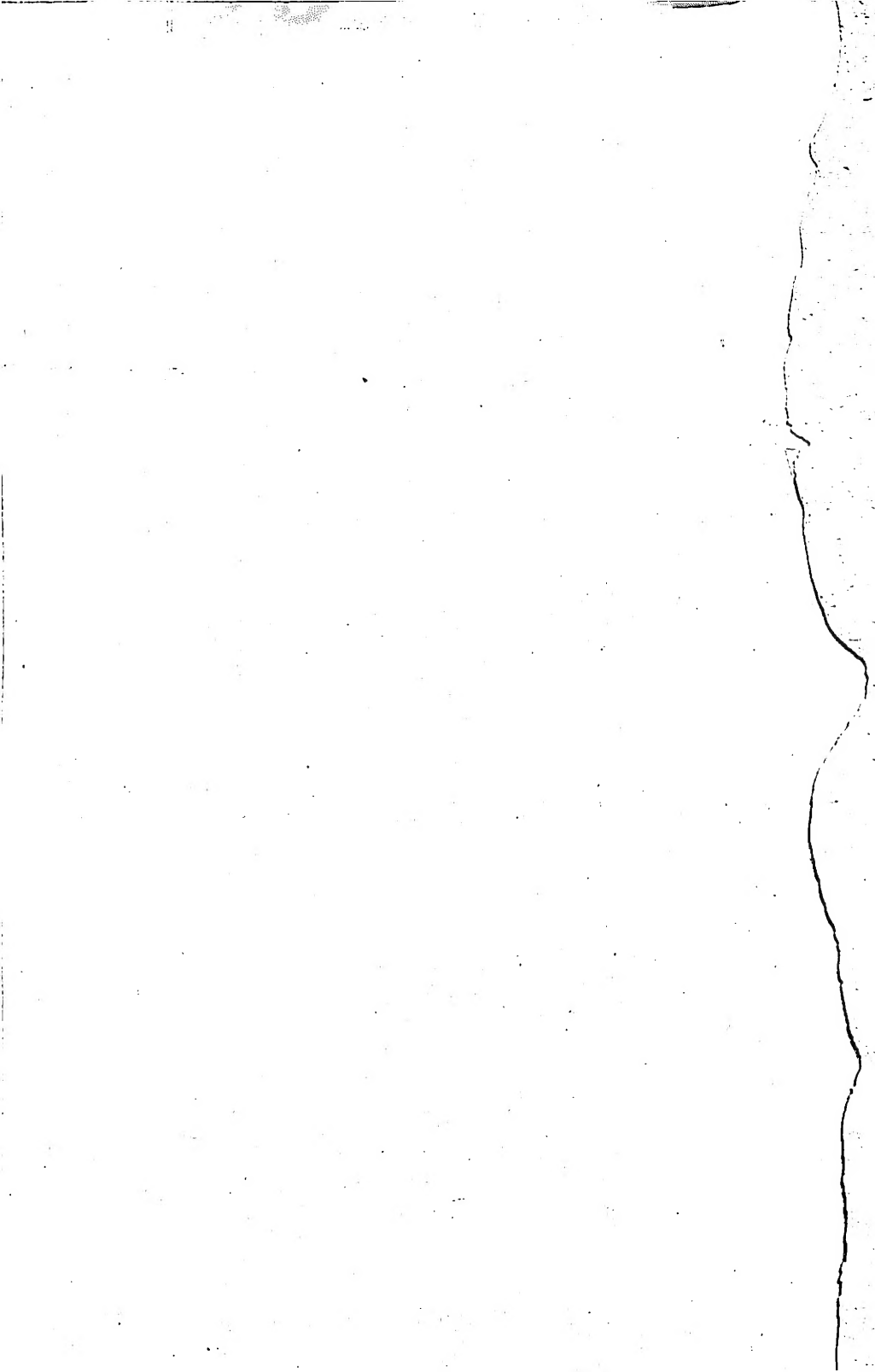
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